水城正太郎　みずきしょうたろう

『東京タブロイド』シリーズ（富士見ミステリー文庫）、『せんすいかん』シリーズ（ＨＪ文庫）。『ホビー・データ』を経て、現在ライター集団『Ａ－ＴＥＡＭ』主催。暇だ暇だと思っていたら、年末になって一気に忙しくなりました。どんな職業であろうと誰であろうと年末には忙しくなるものなんだなぁ！
と意味のわからない感動を味わっています。なんだかんだで忙しいのは楽しいものなのです。毎日十二月希望。

伊藤宗一　いとうそういち

兵庫県在住のイラストレーター兼漫画家。
一般向けから成年向けまで幅広く活動中。
好物は、熱血・筋肉・萌え・エロ・爺。
＜近況＞ジェット・リーの蹴り技を真似したら、足の小指をタンスに。

カバーイラスト／伊藤宗一　装丁／西村 大

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水城正太郎　いちばんうしろの大魔王

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HOBBY JAPAN

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水城正太郎　作品

せんすいかん　その1
せんすいかん　その2
せんすいかん　その3
せんすいかん　まとめ
いちばんうしろの大魔王

「将来の職業……魔王」
社会の役に立つために『コンスタン魔術学院』に編入し、国家一級魔術師を目指す紗伊阿九斗。しかしその初日にとんでもない予言をされてしまう。おかげで委員長の女の子に恨まれる、不思議な力を持つ少女に懐かれる、帝国の監視員である女性型人造人間に見張られるなど散々な学園生活を送ることに……。

HOBBY JAPAN

いちばんうしろの大魔王
モッファアアアアアア

ころね
政府から送られてきたリラダンと呼ばれる人造人間。常に阿九斗に付き添い護衛と監視を行なう。
服部絢子（はっとりじゅんこ）
真面目なクラス委員。阿九斗に裏切られたと思い込み、阿九斗を目の敵にしている。
曽我（そが）けーな
落ちこぼれな天然少女。阿九斗と偶然出会って懐いてしまう。
紗伊阿九斗（さいあくと）
大魔王(予定)の主人公
このへん

「あ、ご、ごめん……！」
阿九斗はけーなにのしかかっていることに気づき、立ち上がろうとした。
「きゃ！　だ、駄目！」

Prologue

It was two in the morning when everyone was fast asleep.

A small light raced across the night sky.

If any resident of this world had looked up at it, they would have known immediately what it was. It was not a shooting star, a bird, or a flying machine. It was the mana luminescence of a magic user's flight magic.

A black-haired woman wearing a luxurious long coat tore through the freezing air. The sweat on her stiffened cheek flowing backwards and flying off as a mist showed that her tense expression was due to more than just the chill of the night.

A silver symbol glowed on the chest of her long coat. The symbol depicted a snake with an apple in its mouth coiled around a double cross. Those known on this continent as black magicians chose to wear that symbol.

A small hand appeared from within the coat and began playing with the symbol. The woman was holding a baby.

While soothing the baby with one hand, she glanced over her shoulder. Flying without stirring up mana was impossible, but she would have detected a presence if she was being pursued. However, she detected no such presence. Then again, her flight was greatly stirring up the mana around her, so any pursuer would be able to track her location from afar.

"I only need to keep them from knowing where this child is," she muttered.

In order to hide her presence, she landed before reaching her destination and walked through the darkness without even using light magic. While in the air, she had seen a small town at the end of a small road through this forest. She was unfamiliar with this land, but from the layout of the town's buildings and the symbol carved into the town gate, she knew this town would suit her needs.

The town was perfectly silent. It likely had a few hundred residents, but the church near the entrance was quite large and likely had the facilities required to perform a baptism. The child needed to be baptized no matter what. Fortunately, the main god here was Ko Ro. That sect's primary doctrine was one of unconditional love. It was the perfect place to leave the child.

When the woman reflected on the fact that she would be leaving the child here, a feeling similar to relief finally budded within her. She would be leaving their child, that child on whom such great hopes were held, to a better place.

"I pray you will remain safe. And that you will have the strength required for the day you realize your destiny."

As she chanted those words of a classic prayer, she removed her long coat, wrapped the child in it, and gently placed it before the door.

"You are our hope."

And as she ran away from that church, she turned back towards the baby. Her eyes were those of a mother worrying for her child. However…

"!"

Her expression changed as she instantly realized her failure and she returned her gaze to the path ahead.

The source of the failure she felt lay in the eyes of the baby that were clearly visible in the darkness.

The baby was not crying; it was staring back at her. An obvious expression could be seen in its eyes that did not befit a child of less than a year old. It was the sulking, resigned look of a fainthearted man in his twenties after a woman broke up with him.

—There's no helping it. I am the one at fault here…

That's what the baby's eyes so eloquently said.

"Your destiny may be different from the one we expect… No, that may actually be precisely what we want…"

The woman muttered to herself to fight back her unease as she disappeared into the forest.

That frighteningly mature baby stared up into the night sky and wondered why it had been left behind.

Ten years had passed since that day.

That baby that had stared up at the stars had grown into a boy who was now blankly staring up into the noontime sky. This boy named Akuto had a difficult personality. He was a perceptive child who had realized he had reached his mental peak at the age of 5. While he was 5, he had seen the orphanage teacher checking the children's schedule for that day and baffled the teacher by asking, "Will you get mad at us if we do not follow that? Do you have to supervise us with that because we are weak?" While on a trip, he had climbed a scenic mountain and pulled out the bento that was much nicer than the usual ones provided. While eating it, he had realized that he would never receive anything more luxurious than that as long as he remained in the orphanage. He was thankful for the blessings others provided him with despite him having done nothing for them, but he realized he would never receive anything more unless he began working for the sake of others. He had shed tears at this realization.

Akuto had obediently spent his time at the orphanage. He was a difficult child to control, but he had a powerful desire to not bother others and to be an overall good person. He would occasionally take some crazy actions, but never enough to lead to a major incident. However, when he was 10 and midway through elementary school, a slight commotion occurred just as he was to leave the orphanage due to a foster home being found for him. A girl of about the same age arrived at the orphanage to replace him.

She had done nothing but cry. This was unsurprising for a child sent to the orphanage because her parents had died and she had no other relatives. Akuto had stopped in his tracks when he saw her. No one had come to see him off at the entrance despite this being his big day. He realized this was because they were spending all their time dealing with that girl. The orphanage teachers comforted the girl as they always did. There was no formalized method, but they were used to this and knew the best way to do so without hurting the child's feelings. They spoke kindly to her and tried to have her play with various stuffed animals. Those superficial words tended to work better than ones spoken with one's whole heart in it. Akuto had long since learned that due to a few different experiences, but with his personality, he could not help but find it unpleasant. And he found the orphans who all began smiling when they should have responded with deep sorrow to be even more unpleasant. However, Akuto finally realized that this girl was no normal child. Even when she took a toy accessory, she only gave it a small amount of interest before crying once more.

Akuto decided he would put an end to her tears. He had borrowed a large suitcase that he would return to the orphanage after transporting his

luggage, so he left that suitcase in front of the orphanage before walking to the shopping district in the center of the town, entering the town's sole small jewelry store, buying a jeweled hair decoration with the money he had been given for his immediate living expenses (enough for an adult to live several months on), and returning to the orphanage. The girl was still crying and the teachers were obviously flustered.

Akuto slipped past the teachers, crouched down in front of the girl, and tugged on her hair to raise her head. The shocked teachers rebuked Akuto's actions, but he wordlessly held the hair decoration in front of the girl's eyes.

It took her some time to realize what was happening, but the unexpected situation made her stop crying all the same. Her round eyes, that were red from crying, looked blankly at Akuto.

She had round eyes on a round face. Each time she rubbed her eyes with her round hand, the few tufts of hair standing up on her head would shake. Her hair was a burning red, so it almost looked like flickering flames. Any girl of her age was cute, but her face made one think she would continue to look youthful even after growing up.

Akuto looked away from the girl and forced the hair decoration into her hand. She did not resist, but she looked up at Akuto with a frightened look when she noticed the jewel set within the eye of the bird-shaped silver hair decoration. Even a child could tell it was real. This was of course not something a child should own. While still looking away from the girl, Akuto told the teachers to make sure no one stole it because it was expensive, and he told the girl not to give it to the teachers even temporarily.

"Th-thank you," said the girl in a blank voice as she looked back and forth between Akuto and the hair decoration. She was acting like he had placed an explosive in her hands.

"I am leaving so I can go work. I do not need the money I was given. You can sell this for money when you leave the orphanage or you can keep it. It is yours now. But I want you to remember that it is something as simple as receiving a gift from someone that stops people from crying. Then again, you only stopped crying for something expensive, so you may be a truly amazing girl. You could probably take on the demon king."

With that said, Akuto returned to the suitcase and put on the long coat that he could finally wear without it dragging along the ground behind him.

"Where are you going?" asked the girl.

"I am leaving this place."

"Wait. We might be able to be friends."

"That is a shame, but I think you will only have to stay in this orphanage for a few years. If you do not get rid of that hair decoration, I will recognize you. We may meet again someday. Bye."

And Akuto took his first step out of the orphanage without waiting for the girl to reply.

Five more years passed.

He had been accepted into the household of a normal knight. It was standard for a knight to take in orphans, so Akuto was received in a businesslike manner. That businesslike manner made living there easy for Akuto, but he quickly realized it also created a difficult atmosphere for discussing anything with his foster parents. That atmosphere and Akuto's own personality made his five years there a difficult time. Every day, he would wake up before dawn to deliver milk, work at a café after school, and teach himself at night so that he could pass his entrance exam. Akuto had grown into the kind of pretty boy that any girl his age could not help but notice, but his daily schedule and his personality made him nigh unapproachable. During his middle school years, he never had a romantic relationship with a girl or even a single close friend. Whenever a girl was drawn in by his pretty face, he would tell her, "People should not introduce favoritism into their relationships with others, and entering into a special relationship with someone inevitably creates a form of discrimination. However, I cannot get along with everyone and for some reason I feel frustrated when I see someone else getting along well with a pretty girl. Nevertheless, I feel it is wrong to get along with that pretty girl myself for no other reason than to rid myself of that frustration. What do you think?" It was understandably difficult for any middle school girl to like a boy who spoke such worries to them and the boys did not want to be friends with someone who acted like that to the girls.

Obviously, nothing could be done about his personality and he had a reason for living the kind of life he lived. For high school, Akuto intended to attend the prestigious national Constant Magic Academy to become a nationally certified magician. That school gave scholarships and he needed one to attend. As this dark and friendless period of his life

continued, his personality grew even worse, but he viewed becoming a nationally certified magician as worth it.

The top class national magicians were undoubtedly the ones who ran the country of Japan. In a society just past the year 3000 CE, the core of the government was made up of those top class national magicians. Only they were bound by no restrictions in their use of magic to serve society and they worked in a variety of fields.

Akuto's reason for wishing to become a national magician was purely so he could help society and serve the people. He could be argumentative, but he was fundamentally a good person. This was all thanks to his powerful desire to help others that he had gained through his upbringing in the orphanage.

And finally, the day came that he was accepted into the school. Akuto almost jumped for joy. Once he was accepted, he could enter the school's dorm. Due to the scholarship he had earned, he could finally completely leave behind his life of being supported by others.

Akuto believed he would be completely reborn in this new stage in his life. And that is precisely what happened.

However, it happened in a way he had never imagined.

Chapter 1: The Demon King is Born

Part 1

Akuto stepped off of a long-distance bullet train shaped like a long, narrow whale and onto a white platform. He dragged his suitcase along as he walked past the magician who specialized in running the train and was opening a mana screen in the space before his eyes. The station was quite crowded with people of various cultures and social statuses. Book stores and stands selling candies shaped like the imperial capital's famous green onions were lined up within the facility and that slight market was filled with activity. Even so, no arguments were evident and the uniformed security magician in the center of the concourse was toying with the shock baton at his waist out of boredom.

—The capital sure is amazing. There are so many people moving around as they please, but no chaos. They must be used to all this movement… No, everyone is headed towards what they want to buy, what they want to see, or where they want to go, but that can't be all there is to it because some people are standing still. Oh, I get it. The person who designed this station may have known what everyone wanted to buy or see, and designed it so people would flow naturally through the station according to their desires. The power of top-class magicians really is amazing.

Hold on to that thought, Akuto followed the directions displayed on a virtual screen floating over his head and headed towards the flying bus stop that would take him directly to Constant Magic Academy. The bus stop bordered on empty air and is built on the top floor of the imperial capital's central train station which is several dozen meters tall. The path leading there ended with a long stairway. As soon as Akuto began climbing those stairs, at the center of the stairway,he spotted an old woman wearing a kimono and holding a few large, heavy-looking bags.

—She's wearing a kimono, so has she received the baptism of the god Suhara?

Akuto ran up the stairs and called out to the old woman from behind.

"I can carry those for you."

The old woman turned around and looked shocked for a moment, but then accepted his offer.

The old woman's shock partially due to her faith. It was natural for everyone to have a religious faith in this society, but someone who displayed their faith on the surface was just showing how stubborn they were about their faith's doctrines. And people generally viewed Suhara followers as horribly hard to get along with. That organization bore the burden of national defense, so people often misjudged them as being "proud" or "arrogant".

"My family is an officially designated family, so people rarely help me in the city," said the old woman as she looked at Akuto amusely.

"I think it is only natural to help someone carry something heavy. By the way, what do you mean by 'officially designated'?" Akuto asked.

"It means we are civil servants from the followers of Suhara. Other examples would be knights and those with noble titles," replied the old woman gently.

"I see."

"By the way, are you a student from magic academy?"

Akuto nodded "I am." and the old woman smiled in embarrassment.

"My granddaughter forgot her luggage. She is also a student at the academy. She returned home for the break, but left all of her luggage behind."

"All of it?"

"Silly, isn't it? She only took her daily school supplies with her."

So, the old woman and Akuto burst into laughter. A figure appeared at the top of the stairs after hearing that laughter.

"Grandmother! I thought I heard your voice, but what are you doing here!?" said a girl the same age as Akuto.

She looked surprised and glanced back and forth between the old woman and Akuto. She was wearing the uniform of Constant Magic Academy.

"You forgot something," said the old woman with a smile.

"Eh? I forgot something? What could I have-….Ehh!?"

The girl's eyes had already been widened in shock, but now they widened even further and she brought a hand to her mouth. Her glossy hair and her almond-shaped eyes gave her an almost frightening level of beauty, but her expression displayed her emotions almost too honestly.

—How could she not realize she left that much luggage?

Akuto was surprised. The girl gave an impression of being a cool-headed beauty, yet it seemed she could be quite the airhead.

The girl looked over at Akuto, grew red in the face, and cleared her throat.

"Grandmother, who is this?"

"Oh, just a boy who helped me with these heavy bags. Such a rare thing these days. It seems he goes to your school, so you can look after him. Or perhaps he needs to look after you."

The old woman laughed like a child.

"What? Grandmother!" The girl reflexively replied like a teased child, but her face stiffened and she cleared her throat once more when she noticed Akuto looking at her. "Ahem… I have not…seen you around school, so you must be a new student. Nice to meet you. I am Hattori Junko, the class representative for Class A. You have my thanks for helping my grandmother."

Junko displayed her thanks like a samurai. Unlike before, her behavior perfectly matched the cool impression her appearance gave.

"No need to thank me," denied Akuto frantically.

"Oh, my. She really is going all out. I will be going then," said the old woman before bowing to Akuto and starting down the stairs.

Junko and Akuto remained in the bus stop.

Some slightly awkward time passed, but Junko eventually spoke.

"New students into the high school are rare."

"I was told there are a few others besides me. From what I heard, the standard here is to receive all your schooling here, so only those with special circumstances are allowed to transfer in."

"Yes, it is rare for someone who is not a foreigner and has not been living overseas to be accepted. What country were you living in?"

"Actually, I got in on a scholarship. I took the entrance exam."

"Oh?" said Junko in admiration. "I heard that zero people pass the exam each year. You must be an excellent student."

Akuto's cheeks loosened in embarrassment.

"Thanks. I hope this is not a rude question, but are you here to become a national magician, Hattori-san?"

"Yes. I must do everything I can for my family and for national defense."

The clumsy impression from before had completely disappeared from Junko's face. She was now the representative image of the skilled class representative and the stubborn and noble Suhara follower.

—I hope we're in the same class.

Akuto had never before had a friend he viewed as an equal. No one else in his rural town had wanted to become a magician for the sake of the country, so this was not entirely Akuto's fault. At any rate, he could tell by looking at Junko that he would find kindred spirits at this academy. Akuto grew even more excited about what lay ahead.

The flying bus arrived. Akuto and Junko were the only two on board, so they sat facing each other in the center box seats.

"Are there no other new students? I thought I was not the only one."

"The students from overseas will have arrived at the academy earlier. You will likely meet up with them for the physical examination."

"I see. …Oh."

Akuto let out a voice as he saw the scenery outside the window.

The flying bus had flown into the sky, leaving the imperial capital down below. He had spotted Constant Magic Academy in the distance.

The school was made up of a few buildings located within a vast forest. The main school building, with two especially magnificent spires, was glittering white in the sun.

"You probably already know this, but the academy was created from a fortress used during the great war with the demon king one hundred years ago. The old school building is really nothing more than a fortress and it still has dozens of kilometers of passageways underground. Now they are like a giant underground labyrinth. People have disappeared down there, so be careful."

"I will. In fact, I intend to live a life with no need for danger. I came here to learn. I intend to reform the world for the better, so I need to learn at the best possible school."

"Reform the world?"

Junko's eyes glittered with interest.

"I want to become one of the high priests that design society," said Akuto.

"Oh!" uttered Junko in admiration. "I've never heard someone actually say that before. Even though the gods supposedly see all actions that go against them, no one is punished for those actions. However, no matter which sect you enter, you cannot break any taboo at all if you wish to be a high priest."

"I know that," replied Akuto carelessly.

Junko looked back at him with a wide-eyed stare. She must have decided from his expression that he was not joking because she gave a large nod.

"Even littering along the road can be an obstacle to becoming a high priest. You have to be truly prepared. I do not know which faith you belong to, but if that is what you truly wish to do, I will help you."

"I would appreciate that. I get the feeling school life here will present some challenges."

—It looks like you get on oddly well with someone if you hold similar values. Even with the opposite sex.

Akuto reached out for a handshake, but Junko raised her hand as if to deny him. Instead, she smiled and pulled a short sword out of her uniform.

"In our sect, we have a ritual for binding friendship between equals. We both hold the knife and clack the guard against the scabbard."

"What a wonderful custom."

"You really think so? It confirms one's friendship by creating a situation where you could betray and stab each other with no recourse."

"I like that kind of tension."

Akuto wrapped his hand around Junko's hand on the knife. Junko used her other hand to grab the hilt and lift it up. She then brought it down to create a dry clacking noise.

"This is only the most minor symbol of friendship, but it is the first time I have done it with a boy," said Junko.

"I'm honored. This is the first time I have ever met anyone like you. I sense something noble in you," replied Akuto honestly.

"I'll blush if you compliment me like that. Recently, there have been fewer proper students and people who act out of a sense of justice or a desire to help others are only laughed at. That must be why we feel such an understanding between us."

"I'm surprised to hear there are a lot of students here who do not take this seriously."

"The academy traditionally provides a lot of freedom. That is not a bad thing in and of itself. It provides experiences that will be useful later in life. However, some students play games with magic in the name of experiments they claim are needed to exterminate the monsters underground and in the forest. All of us class representatives have a difficult job. We even have to supervise the dorms. It is only during the long breaks that we can let down our guard."

As Junko spoke exhaustedly, a cruel smile appeared on Akuto's lips.

"Is that why you forgot your luggage?"

"You idiot, don't tease me," snapped back Junko as she blushed. But then she suddenly began fidgeting while looking up at Akuto. "Um… Could you…keep that a secret…at school? People see me as a strict class representative."

"Don't worry. I will not betray you."

The flying bus slipped onto the roof of the main school building.

When Akuto stepped off of the bus, he felt grass beneath his feet. The vast roof was covered entirely in green. Not only did it function as a bus stop, but it was also a sports ground and a rest area. He spotted the entrance down into the building on the edge of that rooftop plaza. It was a large gate with a bird and cherry blossom design on it.

"A lot of people fly in to the roof, so a second main entrance is prepared here," said Junko while pointing at the gate. "No one else is here, so I'll say it: Welcome to Constant Magic Academy."

Part 2

They walked through the blowing wind and entered the school. Akuto's heart leapt as the stone staircase caused their footsteps to reverberate throughout the area.

"You need to get to the infirmary, right? I need to go to my classroom, so we will part ways here. Even if we end up in different classes, contact me tomorrow," said Junko as she pulled her student handbook. "Once you receive your student handbook, you can bring up a mana communication console on the last page. There's a trick to telepathic communication, but you'll catch on quickly. Just search for my name."

The final page of her student handbook was completely black, but glowing writing appeared when she stroked her finger across it. When she flicked some of that writing, a list of names appeared.

"Once you get used to it, you can control it just by thinking, but if you do not use this tool as an intermediary, you will scatter mana around and allow others to listen in to the conversation. Be careful about that. Goodbye."

After that simple explanation, Junko continued down the stairs.

—I don't think this is love, but I enjoy being around her. I feel like I am being rewarded for all of my effort. This is the first time I have felt that my words are getting through to someone and this is the first time I have entered into a friendship with an equal. Luck must finally be turning in my direction.

While thinking that, Akuto followed a route prepared for new students and finally arrived in front of an infirmary where a dozen or so other students stood in a group.

"You are Sai Akuto-kun, right?" asked a woman wearing a white coat over a suit who stood in the center of the dozen or so students. Data on Akuto had been projected onto her large round glasses and she checked off his name on the memo pad in her hand. "Just on time. That is all of the new students. I am Torii Mitsuko. I work as a school doctor, but I am also a teacher, so some of you may take lessons from me. The others will see me whenever you are not feeling well. Oh, but then I suppose you would not want to see me if you could help it, would you?"

Mitsuko-sensei was tall and had messy hair. She smiled innocently as she spoke, which made her appear sociable and easy to get along with.

"However, this school gets a lot of serious injuries. You should learn this soon enough on your own, but this school is filled with more adventures than any other. It is filled with all sorts of strange things to help you research magic rather than help you study. I am sure you will all have times when you want to go and adventure, but try not to be too reckless because healing you can be difficult."

Mitsuko-sensei opened the door to the infirmary and everyone walked inside.

Akuto was the only new student who was not a foreigner. Most of them had a similar skin color to Akuto, so they were likely from the center of the continent. In addition, some had black skin and some had blonde hair and blue eyes. The material Akuto had been given on the academy had stated that about 15 percent of the students were foreign.

The infirmary was much larger than the one in his old middle school. A gym-sized space was divided into several booths. Some were rooms with beds lined up in them and some were rooms in which surgery was performed. Currently, some people were undergoing treatment

administered by other school doctors. Some were moaning in pain and Mitsuko-sensei began her explanation while glancing over towards them.

"We have never had enough deaths to even bother counting, so do not worry. Now, about the physical examination. Come sit in this seat when I call your name."

Mitsuko-sensei pointed at a large wooden chair in the corner of the room. The back of the chair was large enough to envelop anyone of normal height and the armrests were situated quite high. A tall cylindrical glass container was located on the side of the chair. The glass cylinder was faintly glowing.

"There is an artificial spirit in there which will check your physical health. It does not take long and it does not hurt. More importantly, the spirit will predict your future occupation."

Akuto and the other new students all looked puzzled.

Mitsuko-sensei gave a proud snort.

"This is a crystallization of the empire's magical technology. It uses your personality, how you have lived your life so far, your intelligence, and your physical ability to decide what occupation you should take. You came to this school, so I am sure you all hope to take an occupation that is important to this country. However, this will tell you what specific position that will be. This is not a fortune telling. It is more like advice on what occupation to take based on your personality and abilities. By the way, not a single person has taken an occupation different from what was predicted. Nervous? Don't worry. Merely getting into this school shows you are plenty skilled, so most everyone ends up in the occupation they want."

After hearing that, the new students looked relieved.

—I see. So this is like our official duty upon entering the school.

That was how Akuto viewed it.

"Okay, let's begin."

Mitsuko-sensei called the first student's name.

The nervous-looking boy sat in the chair and a black crow-like bird appeared in the glass cylinder. The bird opened its mouth and spoke in a calm male voice.

"Welcome. I am the artificial spirit Yatagarasu. According to my contract, I will be taking in your personal information and providing advice for your future. New student #001: Yo Lanlee. No health problems. Future occupation…soldier."

The boy's face lit up when he heard the word 'soldier'. It must have been exactly what he wanted.

The new students continued to receive their diagnosis from Yatagarasu one by one. None of them looked displeased with the result. Doctor, diplomat, engineer. They were all important occupations for society and were exactly what the students were hoping to do with their lives. This was similar to having their desired futures promised to them, so every single expression was bright.

Finally, Akuto's name was called. He sat in the chair and looked inside the glass cylinder. Yatagarasu looked at Akuto and spoke.

"New student #021 Sai Akuto. No health problems. Future occupation…"

All of the other new students stared at Akuto in great curiosity. They were interested in what occupation their future schoolmate would have and Akuto was the only new student who was an imperial subject. They all waited expectantly for Yatagarasu to speak.

Yatagarasu's tone remained the same as before, but his unexpected words rang heavily through the room.

His words sounded especially bizarre after all the previous normal responses.

"Demon king."

Question marks appeared on the faces of everyone in the room.

Akuto was no exception. He had no idea what the artificial spirit was saying, so he remained motionless in the chair.

Mitsuko-sensei looked doubtfully over at Yatagarasu.

"What did you say?"

"Future occupation: demon king," repeated Yatagarasu.

He was an artificial spirit, so his words held no emotion. It was Mitsuko-sensei who grew flustered. She stood up and walked over to the glass cylinder.

"Say that one more time."

"Demon king. The common name for the ruler of monsters. As an occupation, demon king refers to the person who will be the most powerful destructive force against society."

Only after hearing those calm words did Akuto understand what was being said about him.

"Wh-what?"

He could only think it was a joke.

"Y-you stay seated. Once more. Diagnose him once more."

After quieting Akuto, Mitsuko-sensei approached Yatagarasu.

"The diagnosis is accurate. He will become a demon king. Both his character and abilities point in that direction."

The artificial spirit was not worried in the slightest. Mitsuko-sensei put her right thumb in her right ear. She was using magic to speak telepathically. She was not speaking out loud, but Akuto understood that she was contacting a specialist with the system.

After a short pause, Mitsuko-sensei took her finger out of her ear.

"Y-you will probably be retested. Don't worry. It's okay. Once you are retested, you will get a normal result. Th-the rest of you do not need to worry either. That is all for today. The opening ceremony is tomorrow, so do not be late."

Mitsuko-sensei sent the other new students out of the infirmary. However, they were muttering amongst themselves. Left behind, Akuto was assaulted by intense anxiety telling him this was not good.

—This is definitely going to spread as a rumor. This is very bad. What is going on? This has to be a bad joke. Or is this Yatagarasu on the fritz? No, even if it is, the rumor will still spread. I have to do something…

His thoughts spun around and around in his head.

Mitsuko-sensei turned towards Akuto with a stiff expression.

"At any rate, I have contacted the headmaster. Please wait in my office until he gets back to me."

Part 3

Akuto could only think it had been a bad dream. He spent a long, uncomfortable time in Mitsuko-sensei's office next to the infirmary before the headmaster finally contacted them.

A mana screen opened above the desk and displayed an old man whose face was covered by a white beard. He looked like a white fur ball growing from a 1000-year-old tree, so Akuto could not even guess at his age. That old man suddenly spoke in a sociable tone of voice.

"It would seem that you are destined to become the next demon king."

"Eh?" replied Akuto, forgetting that he was speaking with the headmaster.

"The demon king. You are destined to replace the same being who ignited the war that took place 100 years ago. Yes, that was a difficult time. Ha ha ha."

The headmaster gave a dry laugh.

"If you understand what all this means, then please explain it to me. What do you mean by demon king?"

"A demon king is a man who rebels with the intention of destroying society," carelessly explained the headmaster.

"But…that is not an occupation, is it? Why are you saying I will become one? And if you know I will become one, surely you can put together some form of countermeasure."

Akuto desperately argued his case, but the headmaster only gave another dry laugh.

"That is a 100-year-old lesson. Back when advances in magic first allowed us to determine people's destinies, we had to decide whether to take countermeasures against those destinies. I chose to not do so. Or rather, I chose to let live those who would harm others. We monitor them, but they are free to do as they wish. Until the moment they commit a crime, of course. So it may be that you will become a threat in the future. You may

even start a war or slaughter all those around you, but until then, you are a student of my school. I believe everyone should work to ensure you do not become the demon king, but no one knows what will actually happen."

He was much more talkative than his appearance suggested. But no matter how cheerful his tone was, the words themselves held heavy meaning. He was saying Akuto would likely become someone who harms others, but that they would do nothing until it actually happens.

"That can't be…"

Akuto was almost at a loss for words, but he did understand the reasoning behind it. In fact, he would have readily accepted the decision had it been about someone other than him.

"Your personality and abilities match perfectly to being a demon king. However, you will likely run into a fair bit of trouble from now on."

The headmaster almost seemed to be enjoying himself, but the word "trouble" bothered Akuto.

"What do you mean by trouble?"

"Many of our students can be rather hot-blooded. Basically, I am saying you might be attacked at any moment."

"You have got to be joking."

Akuto shuddered. The students of this school would certainly attack with magic.

The headmaster seemed to have something to say regarding Akuto's expression.

"If you wish, I can request that the government sends you a bodyguard for your school life."

"A bodyguard?"

"Yes, a bodyguard. Although they would double as an observer. They would stay by your side as a student. But only if you wish for it."

—I see. That does make sense… But then I would be monitored 24/7.

"What if I decline the offer?"

"The academy will do all we can, but you will not have a normal school life."

"I feel like I am being threatened…"

"If you see it that way, you can try it out on your own for now. If you feel the need later, just tell me."

"That sounds best," replied Akuto.

The screen disappeared and Mitsuko-sensei brought her hands to her hips and sighed while watching Akuto.

"Yatagarasu gave me the data used to determine you becoming the demon king, but there is so much data only an artificial spirit can process it all. And this data might not even be completely accurate either…"

Mitsuko-sensei suddenly grabbed Akuto's hand.

Akuto was startled, but he could see a serious look in her eyes through her glasses.

—I see. So she's worried about me.

As he felt a bit moved by that, she began speaking in an earnest tone.

"I am sure you will face difficult times. This will already have spread as a rumor, so you will gather attention as someone special. I am sure you will be harassed. It may take the form of bullying so harsh you may consider committing suicide or students burning with a sense of justice attempting to assassinate you! After all, some will think it is perfectly okay to kill the boy who will become the demon king. But directly killing you would be a crime. Yes, I am certain the murder will be carried out in some ingenious way that even a god would have a hard time telling apart from an accident. You might be assigned adventures with the assumption you will not come back alive or some students may hide your belongings and spread embarrassing photos of you around the world to push you to suicide."

Mitsuko-sensei's passionate speech gradually veered in an odd direction. A burning flame could be seen within her eyes.

"Um… Why do you keep talking about me being killed or committing suicide?"

"Do not worry! If you die, I will use necromancy to bring you back as a spirit of the dead. Even if that only preserves a map of your personality, your data will remain! Fully analyzing the data of the person destined to become the demon king would be an amazing asset for a researcher, don't you think? Oh, and I am not thinking at all that having you survive would be problematic as the data would change day by day. I do not want you to die in the slightest. So don't worry! If you want to die, just come discuss it with me!"

—Not if you get this enthusiastic about it…

Akuto decided Mitsuko-sensei was not the type to keep much hidden below the surface. He could only imagine his troubles with her would only progress. She certainly did not appear to be helpful.

He shook off Mitsuko-sensei who clearly wanted to say more, left the main school building that was thankfully empty, and headed to the dorm using the instructions on the papers he had been given as a new student.

The dorm was just as large as the school building and almost looked like a castle in and of itself. The academy had been a fortress in the past, so the students stayed in the knight garrison. The academy ran on the boarding system, so almost every student lived in their dorms. The castle was divided between east and west. One half was the boys' dorm and the other was the girls'. As soon as one passed through the gate, the dorm mother's room and a reception window were located directly to the side. The rumor must not have spread here yet because the fairly old dorm mother handed him his room key and gave a short explanation of the rules without issue. He then fled to his room without meeting anyone else. As a new student, his room was at the very end of the first floor.

The simple room had only a bed, a desk, a closet, and a storage space up high, but he felt he could live comfortably in it. A student handbook and a folded uniform had been placed on top of the desk.

He sat on the bed and sighed.

"Demon king…"

He still could not believe it. Despite the standard image one had of a "demon king", it was common knowledge that the demon king had been a real person who had attempted to overthrow society. His identity was unknown, but the government had announced that he had been a dangerous magician who had started a war while ruling over monsters.

Monsters were still known to exist, but it seemed doubtful they held enough intelligence to be ruled over by a human. Akuto knew very little about what kind of creatures monsters had been back then. He had only heard they were similar to the demons from fairy tales. It did seem "something" had changed in society after that incident just as the headmaster had said, but events from one hundred years in the past did not feel real to Akuto.

However, the impression people had of the demon king would never fade away or diversify. And that was especially true in this academy where students were taught magic. The demon king was the symbol of evil and black magic, so their feelings about him had to be complicated at the very least.

That meant Mitsuko-sensei's warnings were not just due to her desire for data. However, he expected more fear and hostility than harassment.

—But I have always tried to do good. I have never consciously done anything bad. There is no way I will become the demon king. If I show that in my actions, everyone is sure to understand. First impressions are important. The popular members of my old class specialized in sociable jokes and small talk. If I give a proper introduction, they are sure to realize that no demon king would introduce himself like that.

Akuto began simulating his introduction.

—Nice to meet you. I am sure you have all heard the rumors, but apparently I am supposed to become the demon king in the future. However, I think I would rather be a monkey than a de-monkey-ng.

—No, that's no good…

—That sounds way too stupid. I'm not good at making jokes… I take everything too seriously. I can't do it even to save my chances of a normal life in high school…

—But then what am I supposed to do? I guess I have to keep it serious. I will speak my mind and actively work to help the school. I know. How about I nominate myself as the cleaning officer? No one wants to do that kind of annoying job. And that will also allow the teacher to quickly learn who I am.

After finishing that mental one-man conversation, Akuto felt relieved. And then an announcement was broadcast through the dorm.

<<It is time for dinner. Please gather in the dining hall.>>

When Akuto entered the dining hall, he immediately realized the situation had progressed in a delicate direction more quickly than he had expected. The dining hall contained three long tables big enough to seat 200 people each. Every student gathered there seemed to be holding each other in check while searching for any unfamiliar faces who would be the new students. However, the atmosphere was not that of welcoming in some new students. It felt more like an isolated mansion in a snowy mountain after someone had been murdered.

—This is bad…

Akuto tried to look calm as he sat at the end of one of the tables. The primary difference from a mansion murder mystery was that all of the new students knew who the future demon king was. The other students gradually realized who it was all the new students were looking at.

"He doesn't look violent."

"No, it's the intellectual type who can be truly cruel."

"He does look clever."

Akuto could hear students whispering amongst themselves. This was quite a shock to him and he found it impossible to endure. However, his personality did not allow him to simply grow depressed. After seeing that everyone had seated, he banged on the table and stood up.

"I would like to introduce myself to my new classmates and upperclassmen. My name is Sai Akuto. I am the rumored new student who Yatagarasu diagnosed as a future demon king!"

All of the students gathered in the dining hall began murmuring at the sudden affirmation of the rumor. Akuto raised his voice, but his voice was not reaching the far end of the large dining hall. That was when a smart but mischievous looking boy sitting nearby quickly raised his right hand and called out "Speaker!" An artificial creature that looked like a camera with wings flew into the dining hall and stopped above Akuto's head.

That artificial creature's face (or what Akuto assumed was its face given the position of its wings) was turned towards Akuto. He saw something like a camera lens there. The rear end of the creature had a similar lens-like device that glowed and projected an image of Akuto near the ceiling.

Akuto looked over at the mischievous-looking student and the boy gave him a thumbs-up.

"It does indeed seem I am predicted to become a demon king and it seems these diagnoses have never been wrong in the past!"

As Akuto continued speaking, his voice was amplified.

—I really didn't think this through…

He began to regret this, but it was too late to turn back now. Leaving things vague here would leave the others with a poor impression of him. His personality did not let him finish without saying what he intended to say.

—Well, whatever

"However, I wish to question that very system of examination. Does that really decide our destinies? Are we not simply accepting that as our path in life after hearing that prediction? It is true the gods watch over our personalities and the way we have lived our lives and that data is used in this prediction. However, humans are not restricted to a single possibility! Do we not need to escape that preconceived notion? If we do not, our world can never advance!"

His audience began to notice that this was well organized for an impromptu speech. At first, they had been heckling him, but the dining hall gradually fell silent as everyone began focusing on listening to Akuto's words.

Akuto raised his voice further, "I shall accept your inquisitive gazes. However, I must criticize the fact that none of you attempted to ask me directly as to the truth of the matter! Was that not because you gave in to your fear? What if I had truly been someone who would become demon king? Or did you think it would negatively impact you to be seen with me? Avoiding someone without confirming the truth leads to one-sided discrimination! You should be ashamed of that fear. Many commoners view those learned in magic as a superior race. Magic is not meant to show the superiority of the individual, yet this erroneous thinking shall continue as long as you continue thinking of yourselves as elites! And it shall continue as long as diagnosing one's future occupation is so prevalent!"

Only after getting a bit carried away with his speech did Akuto start to have some internal doubts.

—Is it just me or am I criticizing the system this school runs on as well as the country's magical policies?

The students had all entered this top-rate school, so all of them had surely noticed this as well. One of them must have had some experience with the data on the past demon king because someone whispered, "Isn't this almost identical to the demon king's declaration of war 100 years ago?"

—W-what!?

Akuto may have gotten carried away, but he had been speaking his honest feelings. He had never thought that would have this result. And the fact that these words had come off the cuff seemed to be having a negative effect.

"That's way too good for an unscripted speech."

"He moved me for an instant and I thought he was right…but this criticism of the structure of society is way too dangerous."

"He has the talents of a demon king…"

"He's the reincarnation of the demon king…"

Akuto could clearly hear those muttered comments.

—This is dangerous. I am in an extremely dangerous situation here. It always works out like this. I am only trying to do what I think is right, so why does this happen?

Akuto lamented, but he was not aware that he was a very persuasive speaker thanks to his pointlessly clever-looking and handsome face and the groundless self-confidence his argumentative personality gave him. Partially due to his secret desire not to look bad in front of everyone, he did not even think about the possibility of simply ending his speech here.

"Yes, I am criticizing the structure of society. However, that does not mean I intend to destroy it! I have entered this academy so that I can change that structure from within! I wish to prove that I am not a demon king by doing so! I hope you will help me with this! Even if you try to oppose me, I will not confront you. If we talk it out and learn to get along, I am sure we can find an answer!"

At some point, his tone had changed from a polite one to the forceful tone of a dictator's speech. Akuto was motioning wildly with his hands and

speaking so passionately his hair was thrown into disarray. Some of the students listening were briefly entranced by him, but as soon as he stopped speaking, they shook their heads and slapped their cheeks to bring themselves back to reality.

The more of an impact his speech had given, the more deeply the meaning of his words would be engraved in their hearts. However, his speech could be interpreted to mean the following:

I don't know if I will be a demon king or not, but I mean to place myself in the center of this school's system to spread my way of thinking.

Naturally, Sai Akuto understood this is what he had ultimately said.

—Can I really get by in this school after this? …But looking weak now would only make this worse.

"That is all I wish to say. I apologize for disturbing you. Now, let's get to dinner."

Akuto tried to speak as gently as possible, but those around him viewed it as the composure of a corrupt noble.

"Is that any way for a new student to act? And a first year at that."

"He definitely is no normal person."

"What should we do? This could turn into a conflict that divides the entire school."

"I doubt anyone would actually join his side."

"But if he has talent in magic or…"

The commotion in the dining hall showed no sign of calming down. With everyone focused on him, Akuto could only nervously straighten his back and eat while following every code of etiquette. Later, he could not remember what he had eaten or what it had tasted like.

Part 4

The next morning, Akuto awoke after a nearly sleepless night. Breakfast was oddly quiet and tense, but he endured somehow. Afterwards, everyone walked to their classes for the homeroom period before the opening ceremony. Akuto entered his classroom five minutes before

homeroom began and all the girls stared at him curiously as soon as he walked in the door.

—That's right. There are girls here too.

The rumor would have naturally spread to the girls as well. It was possible the image from that "speaker" had been played in the girls' dorm as well. In fact, it must have for all the girls to immediately recognize him.

—I need to stay composed and smile back.

"Good morning," he said.

This was met with voices that were not quite coquettish and not quite disgusted. It seemed about half of them viewed him favorably and about half viewed him negatively.

However, Akuto's eyes were fixed on one girl in particular. This beautiful girl had glossy hair and almond-shaped eyes. It was Junko. Akuto finally recalled which class he had been assigned to.

—This is Class A. Oh, I completely forgot I promised to contact her.

Junko seemed to be intentionally avoiding meeting Akuto's gaze. None of the others were asking her about him, so she must have kept it a secret that they had met the day before.

—Oh, dear…

Akuto did not want to cause any trouble for Junko, so he pretended not to know her. He avoided looking anyone in the eye as he walked to the seat in the very back that had been prepared for him. As soon as he sat down, the classroom door opened and Mitsuko-sensei entered.

"Okay, everyone to your seats. I, Torii Mitsuko, will be your homeroom teacher this year as well. I had most of you in middle school, but it is nice to meet those I did not. I tend not to bother going down every name for attendance. As for today…Oh, Soga-san is absent again. She's probably asleep somewhere like usual. Someone go call for her." With that offhand comment, Mitsuko-sensei closed her attendance notebook and looked towards Junko. "That just leaves deciding on our class representative, but with mostly the same faces, I assume I can just ask Hattori Junko-san."

Junko started to nod in agreement, but someone else cut in.

"Sensei! Choosing a class representative without a vote creates a dictatorship and prevents us from advancing!"

That voice gave Akuto a very bad feeling. This person was copying his own tone of voice from his speech the night before. He looked over to a seat diagonally in front of him and found exactly who he expected. The same boy who had called in the "speaker" was giving Akuto a thumbs-up with a mischievous expression.

"I nominate Sai Akuto-kun for class rep! We all heard his speech and I think helping us all out as class rep will help him prove he will not become the demon king!"

The entire class was now muttering to each other.

"Quiet down, everyone," said Mitsuko-sensei while clapping her hands together.

Akuto looked over at Junko without thinking. She looked away, but he caught a glimpse of her expression. He had expected anger, but he found the look of someone desperately trying to endure a bottomless disgrace.

—Suhara followers feel great pride in their official positions, so this involves her faith as well…

Akuto panicked. Junko was supposed to be his first friend and yet he had now betrayed her several times over.

He raised his hand and said, "Sensei, don't I get a say? I step down. Instead, um…I would like to be the class janitor. If you have one here."

Mitsuko-sensei's expression had remained cheerful so far, but it suddenly stiffened when he said that.

The atmosphere of the class changed all at once. The class had already been in a strange mood, but this announcement plunged the atmosphere below the freezing point.

"Wait…Sai-kun…" Mitsuko-sensei finally spoke. "Do you understand what you are saying?"

"What?"

Akuto had no idea what was happening. He could not imagine why the classroom had grown so tense.

Mitsuko-sensei gave an explanation while sounding as if this was something too filthy to put into words.

"The class janitor is the student who 'cleans up' all of the students and the academy's secrets if those secrets can no longer be protected during a war with monsters or another country. In other words, that student is in charge of destruction and execution. The position has never been filled since the end of the war, but the name still exists in the records. It is considered too abominable to even mention."

—What the hell!?

Akuto could not believe his bad luck. He had unwittingly hit on the worst possible term to use.

"You don't understand. I just wasn't interested in any of the other positions," he said without thinking, and the class froze over even further. "No, that isn't what I-…"

He trailed off because no one was listening.

Junko stood up while raising her voice almost to a shout.

"Sai Akutooo! You toyed with my heart!"

Junko glared at Akuto with a horrific expression and disheveled hair.

Akuto did not blame her for being angry, but…

—Saying it like that is only going to make this worse.

Akuto grew oddly calm. Just as he feared, the entire class appeared to have made some sort of misunderstanding. They looked back and forth between Akuto and Junko.

"I thought I told you our vow could only be repaid in blood if it was broken!"

Junko pulled a wooden sword from beside her desk.

—Using the word "vow" will only make the class think we had some sort of relationship as a boy and a girl… That misunderstanding will hurt Hattori-san once she cools her head and can think straight.

"You say 'our vow', but we are not talking about a lifelong marriage here. It was nothing more than a bit of good-natured fun on an empty bus," said Akuto.

The class seemed to accept his correction oddly well.

—Uh, oh.

Akuto finally realized his error, but it was too late.

Junko was so angry she seemed to give off a red aura from her entire body as she pointed her wooden sword towards Akuto. The sword was a magical item, an artifact, so the light wrapped around it was a torrent of mana, not an illusion.

"S-s-such humiliation! I challenge you to a duel! Right here and now!"

Junko pulled another wooden sword from next to her desk. (A great number of them were contained in a bag hanging from the side of her desk.) She threw it hilt-first at Akuto. He instinctually caught it, but could only look over at Mitsuko-sensei for guidance.

"She is a Suhara follower. Religious duels are allowed under the school rules," said the teacher with a cold expression.

She too seemed to view Akuto as an enemy of women everywhere.

"The winner gets to be class rep!" announced a mischievous boy behind Akuto with an excited expression. He tapped on Akuto's shoulder and whispered to him with a look of respect. "My name's Miwa Hiroshi. You can call me Hiroshi! I'll call you aniki! Aniki, you're amazing! I'm treated like a delinquent because of my bad grades, but your ideals really got through to me! I feel like I could become anything I set my mind to!"

—Isn't most of this your fault?

However, Akuto did not have time to focus on him.

"Haahhhhhhhhh!"

With that shout of exertion, Junko's attack flew towards Akuto.

"Wah!"

Akuto was still sitting, but he managed to avoid it by falling backwards in his seat. The strength and reflexes he had built up with his delivery job had paid off.

"Okay, this is dangerous. Stay back, everyone," instructed Mitsuko-sensei while clapping twice.

Everyone in the class except for Junko and Akuto lined up along the classroom wall. Mitsuko-sensei clapped once more and a mana field enveloped Junko and Akuto. This seemed to be Mitsuko-sensei's magic. They no longer needed to worry about damaging anything outside that field.

—I am in serious trouble. I need to break free of this situation somehow… I have to calm Hattori-san.

Akuto looked at Junko. With the red anger blazing in her eyes, it was obvious she was not going to listen.

"Chaahhhh!"

The second strike came. He jumped back to avoid it.

"Aniki, go for it!"

Akuto heard Hiroshi cheering him on from outside.

This only frustrated him further.

—The only way to calm Hattori-san down…

Akuto thought frantically, but only a simple idea came to mind.

—…is this!

"Ryaahhh!"

Just as Junko let the third strike fly, Akuto stepped forward for some reason.

Junko's wooden sword shot straight for the top of Akuto's head. The instant before it seemed his head would be smashed, Akuto twisted his body to the side and out of the way while continuing forward. Akuto advanced past the guard of Junko's sword.

"What!?"

Surprise replaced the anger in Junko's eyes.

The entire class was staring at Junko and Akuto.

A commotion filled the classroom like an earthquake.

Akuto managed to embrace Junko's body from the front. Their two bodies joined together like the embrace of two lovers after a long separation.

"Calm down," Akuto whispered in Junko's ear.

"Ah!"

Whether she was ticklish or reacting to the actual problem at hand, Junko jerked backwards and almost felt to the ground. Akuto reached his arm around her waist to support her, which only strengthened the image that he was coming in for a kiss.

"Wh-what are you doing? Let go of me…" groaned Junko.

"I will not let go until this misunderstanding has been cleared up," said Akuto with a deadly serious expression.

"What misunderstanding? You have humiliated me so much…and are continuing to do so… I have never felt such disgrace!"

"This is all a misunderstanding. I have had nothing but good intentions and never meant to humiliate you."

"R-really…?"

Junko seemed to have calmed down a bit because she was actually listening to him now.

Feeling a bit relieved, Akuto continued speaking gently.

"Really. So let us return to the relationship we had. I made that promise because I had taken a liking to you. That was not a decision I made lightly."

However, the rest of the class could hear his words.

Junko and Akuto finally realized what their position looked like to an outside observer.

"Wow… That's a demon king for you…"

"He defeated that straight-laced Hattori Junko who's said to be the strongest of the class reps… Or should I say he had her fall for him."

"Looks to me like he had already done that before today."

Everyone in the class was muttering to each other.

Junko's face grew beet red in an instant.

"This is exactly what I was talking about! How much must you humiliate me!?" shouted Junko.

She twisted her body around to move away from Akuto and swung her wooden sword down at him with all her strength. Akuto's pose did not allow him to evade it.

"Watch out!"

Realizing he could not avoid the blow, Akuto swung up his own wooden sword. Even if he could not evade the blow, he could block it. He poured all his strength into the one hand to brace for the coming impact.

And…

A power Akuto had never even imagined existed was born within his right arm. He felt a mass of gathered heat travel from his arm and fill the wooden sword.

—Not good!

Despite that reflexive thought, he could not stop the power from surging out. Just as he thought the heat would be released through the sword, light exploded in the space between Junko and Akuto's swords.

Pure white light filled the center of the classroom. The explosion of light easily broke through the mana field Mitsuko-sensei had set up and flowed outside.

"Get down!" shouted Mitsuko-sensei with a look of shock.

An explosive blast and explosive noise filled the classroom.

Miraculously, no one was injured. However, all four walls of the classroom had been blown away. Junko and Akuto stood blankly in the center of the students who were covered by ash and rubble.

Word of the incident spread throughout the entire school in the blink of an eye. This became how the entire student body viewed Akuto.

Chapter 2: The Strange Observer

Part 1

"Um, you did nothing wrong. You were challenged to a duel and fought back," said Mitsuko-sensei from directly in front of Akuto in the infirmary.

"But I didn't actually fight back…"

"On the record, you did. Otherwise, you would be charged for the repairs to the classroom. Um, do you not actually understand what happened?" asked Mitsuko-sensei awkwardly.

Just as she said, Akuto had no idea what had happened. He scratched his head in bewilderment and she continued.

"Mana fills the air and various effects are produced by moving it. Energy is pumped into the earth itself from the power generation facility in the center of the imperial capital and the mana resonates with it. That is why mana is often thought to be the same as energy. Of course this is all just the basics of magic."

Even Akuto knew that much.

"However, the rest is what students come to this school to learn, so you wouldn't know. Mana can be stored within the bodies of living beings which allows them to draw out energy. Think of it like using up calories. The amount of mana stored within someone varies from person to person. The more mana inside your body, the greater the effect when using the mana in the atmosphere. A human's will is transferred via electrical impulses in the brain, those electrical impulses manipulate the mana in the body, and the external mana resonates with it. That is how magic works. That is also why some people simply have more natural talent with magic. A stronger will controlling those electrical impulses and a greater amount of mana in the body leads to greater talent. This is not a secret, but most normal people go their whole lives without learning about it."

"So I caused that explosion?"

"You catch on quickly. That wooden sword was made to harden itself when mana is gathered in it, but you gathered too much mana which caused it to be released in an explosion."

"Does that mean I used an unexpected amount of mana? Or at least more than that sword was meant to take?"

"Yes. And remember that you broke through my field as well. I am not a teacher in this school for nothing. I was said to have talent that comes along only once a decade. I never thought I would lose to a student, but…here we are. Your ability seems to be off the charts."

Mitsuko-sensei laughed good-naturedly, but not just because of her personality. It seemed Akuto really did have an unbelievable amount of power.

"It is amazing no one was injured. It seems you subconsciously controlled the energy released from the sword. But…"

"But it might not go so well next time?" continued Akuto with a sigh.

"Yes. The students here get into a lot of fights, so I am worried what will happen if you get into a fight."

"I have no intention of getting into any fights…but I doubt it will be that easy."

Even if he did not want any trouble, someone was sure to pick a fight with him. Especially Junko. Akuto felt depressed.

"Fights will be almost unavoidable. You need to grow as a human being while also learning to control your magical power."

Mitsuko-sensei fell silent as if waiting for a response from Akuto. Guessing what she wanted, Akuto nodded.

"Understood. Please call in the observer," he said with a sigh.

According to the headmaster, this person would observe Akuto in his school life. However, they would also protect him.

—Nothing is going according to plan…

Akuto sighed again.

After Mitsuko-sensei contacted someone, she told him the observer would arrive the following day.

"This may be a harsh way of putting it, but try not to cause any trouble until this observer arrives. If anything happens before then, just contact me."

Mitsuko-sensei entered her address into Akuto's student handbook.

"Also," she added as her eyes suddenly began glittering. "Could you sign this saying I can research on your body if you die?"

"Not a chance."

Part 2

Akuto returned to the dorm filled with exasperation, but he found no respite there. As soon as he stepped inside, Hiroshi ran over and bowed down so far it looked like he was going to lick Akuto's shoes.

"W-wait, Miwa-kun…"

"C'mon, aniki! Call me Hiroshi!"

Hiroshi led Akuto into the dorm while taking on the role of an outrider.

"Outta the way! Clear a pathway for the future demon king!"

Hiroshi began threatening the gathering students.

—I-I need to do something about him…

"Hey, could you stop that?"

Hiroshi looked utterly shocked when he turned around.

"Wh-why, aniki!?"

"You shouldn't scare them."

"O-oh, I get it! I thought you wanted to rule with fear, but I should have known better! You intend to gradually take hold of the students' hearts!"

—If I was trying to do that, you would be ruining it by shouting about it in front of everyone…

"Th-that's not it. At any rate, stop treating me like someone special."

"So you plan to conquer this academy after starting from the same standpoint as everyone else!"

Hiroshi's eyes were glittering and his breathing was erratic.

—Conquer…?

Akuto was confused, but he pushed his question aside and spoke more forcefully to Hiroshi.

"I want to live a normal life here, so I need people to treat me normally. I already stand out, so I want you to stop threatening-…"

Akuto trailed off because someone suddenly shouted out down the passageway.

"Are you the one that destroyed a classroom today!?"

Two students were walking towards Akuto. Out of the corner of his eye, Akuto spotted the look on Hiroshi's face completely changing when he saw them.

—This is why I told you to stop this…

The two boys were large and had the distinct rebellious expressions of elite school delinquents. They did not look like nice people, but Akuto was in no position to talk because his expressions could look just as rebellious.

"Sorry about the trouble. It was an accident," said Akuto.

The two of them began laughing.

"Sorry about the trouble?" They mockingly imitated his voice and stared him in the eye. "Anyone with half a brain can blow up a classroom, so don't get so full of yourself."

—Ugh, what a pain in the ass. Why do people spend so much time worrying about nonsense like "honor"? Why are people this stupid allowed to live? They should feel ashamed about all the oxygen they waste breathing.

That was Akuto's honest opinion. And Akuto tended not to think of the consequences when something irritated him too badly.

"Then tomorrow you can have a contest to see who can make the biggest explosion. But I want to study in peace, so do it somewhere a long way from here."

The two boys looked a bit confused when Akuto did not falter, but they soon replied with sneers on their faces.

"If you want to study in peace so much, why did you blow up your classroom?"

"People cannot help but hang around popular people. Is that what this is? People are often too embarrassed to just ask for an autograph, so they try to pick a fight instead."

The two boy's expressions changed when they heard Akuto's mockery.

"Don't talk back to us. Don't you know what happens when you do that?"

"Well, there's two of you, so will you put on a manzai act?"

"You bastard!"

The two of them flew into a rage, but they froze in place when Akuto raised his hand.

"A-anyway, just don't get too full of yourself," they said before turning around and running off.

—Am I really acting full of myself? I don't think they know what they want. That sort of pathetic personality will only end up ruled over by someone else. What would they do if I decided to make them my lackeys?

Akuto quickly realized his thoughts had turned in a dangerous direction. It was a comment from Hiroshi that dragged his thoughts back into reality.

"Amazing, aniki!"

"I told you to stop that…"

"Eh? But those two were upperclassmen."

"I really don't see why we need to bother with that sort of distinction. They've done nothing more than be born a year ahead of us. We should still be polite, of course."

As soon as he said that, Akuto realized "Oh, no!" and looked over at Hiroshi. His face was flushed and he was looking at Akuto with deep respect.

—I see. I felt contempt for the lack of responsibility and sociability in my peers. It showed up in my attitude so now he respects me for it. Even more so since this could have led to violence.

Akuto calmly analyzed the situation, but he still did not understand how he had gotten to this point.

—Was it wrong to focus on nothing but my job and my studies back in my hometown?

"Well…just leave me alone for now. I will stay in my room until dinner," said Akuto before trying to escape.

"Eh? Don't do that, aniki. I was just about to show you around the dorm and the school," said Hiroshi in disappointment.

Akuto rethought his actions.

—Well, I know now what I was doing wrong, so I should be able to apologize to Hattori-san. She is filled with responsibility and sociability. That is why I took a liking to her. I just need to properly explain my personality to her.

With his thoughts moving in the wrong direction in more ways than one, Akuto spoke to Hiroshi.

"In that case, can you tell me how to get to the girls' dorm? I assume there is an official procedure. I haven't had a chance to apologize to Hattori-san."

Hiroshi clapped his hands together in delight.

"You really are amazing, aniki! I can show you the way to the girls' dorm. No official procedure necessary!"

"Thank you."

"This is getting exciting!"

—Exciting? But we're just going to the girls' dorm.

Akuto was a bit confused at Hiroshi acting like a child before a vacation, but he followed the other boy's lead.

Hiroshi left the dorm and circled around the outer wall. A forest surrounded the building and the pathway must have not been used much because it had no lights set up along it. They walked through the dim evening.

"I thought there was a passageway connecting the two sides."

The boys' dorm and the girls' dorm were contained within the two sides of a fortress and a bridge connected them in the middle.

"You want to visit the class rep's room, right? Going outside is easier," assured Hiroshi with a grin.

"Why?"

"Her room is on the very end of the second floor."

Hiroshi pulled out his student handbook and opened it. The screen displayed a map of the girls' dorm.

"They give out maps of the girls' dorm?"

"Only to the girls."

"Eh?"

"It wasn't easy getting my hands on this. You've probably caught on already, but my information is famous among the guys."

—What is he talking about?

Akuto was confused, but the atmosphere of the dorm's exterior changed as they continued walking. They had entered the territory of the girls' dorm.

"We need to be careful from here on," whispered Hiroshi as he crouched down.

"If we are not supposed to be doing this, then we need to-…"

"Shh!" warned Hiroshi while holding a finger to his mouth.

"I never asked you to sneak me in," explained Akuto frantically.

"But you want to meet the class rep, right? It would cause a huge commotion if you did this the official way!"

Hiroshi grinned as if to say, "I thought this through, didn't I?"

"Yeah…it definitely would," agreed Akuto.

He had a feeling Junko would not accept his apology in front of a crowd.

"Also, the standard method for a guy and a girl meeting in the dorm is for the guy to go to the girl's window."

"I see. That would cause fewer problems than the official method."

"Um, yes… Anyway, that's the window."

Hiroshi pointed up at a window. The window had an overhang around it and the wall had plenty of bricks sticking out, so it looked easy enough to climb up to the window.

"I'm supposed to climb up?"

"Of course, aniki. You can't use flight magic yet, right?" said Hiroshi as if that should be obvious. "When you go to a girl's room, you give the window three quick taps followed by three long knocks."

"So that is how it is done."

Akuto nodded and Hiroshi gave him a push forward.

"Okay. Good luck, aniki!"

"Eh? Oh…"

Akuto was confused, but Hiroshi simply said "go on" and waved him on vigorously.

—What is even going on? …Well, if that is the custom, I just have to follow it.

Akuto grabbed onto the wall. He easily climbed up to the second-story window. He hesitated before peering inside.

—That would be rude if she is changing…

Instead, he stuck just his hand up and knocked on the window.

He gave three quick taps followed by three long knocks.

After a short pause, the window burst violently open. Despite being to the side of the window, Akuto felt a blast of wind. It almost felt like she had been trying to kill him with the window.

—I suppose she would be angry. I need to give a sincere apology.

But when he saw Junko's rage-filled face stick out the window, he was taken aback by how angry she still was.

"Such humiliation! Damn you! How much disgrace must you bring me!?"

The tone of Junko's voice had gone beyond anger and arrived at lamentation.

"Please wait a second! I came to apologize!"

"If you are here to apologize, why would you use the sign for a lover coming to spend the night!?"

—That's what that three taps and three knocks means!?

Akuto realized what was happening.

"W-wait! I was tricked into thinking that was the proper etiquette!"

"Everyone is already mistaken about us! I lose to you! I am mocked by you! Ahhh!! There is only one thing I can do! I have to defeat you to clear up all these misunderstandings!"

Junko held out her wooden sword.

"I-I'm sorry. I really am! I wasn't trying to-…"

"Then what were you trying to do, demon king!?"

Akuto crawled along the wall of the girls' dorm while evading Junko's sword.

"I already told you! I'm not a demon king!"

"If you want to prove that, then let me defeat you! That would prove you do not have the strength to be a demon king!"

Akuto felt that did make some amount of sense, but he could not allow himself to be thrashed by that wooden sword when it was being wielded with such killer intent.

"This is all a misunderstanding! I really did take a liking to you!"

"Stop saying it like that!'" shouted Junko.

Others in the dorm had heard the commotion and windows across the building began opening.

"That's that new student!"

"Oh…Is Junko having a fight with her boyfriend?"

"Is it true they tried to commit a lovers suicide in class?"

The girls began spreading rumors between windows. Akuto realized the situation was beyond repair, so he climbed down the wall.

"Th-this is all a misunderstanding, so I'll come back to apologize after you calm down!"

He looked up at the window just in time to see some pure white underwear. It was the white loincloth only pure-born members of the Suhara faith were allowed to wear.

Junko had jumped from the window with no concern on how it would flip up her skirt.

"Keaaaaaaaahhhh!"

"Wah!"

Akuto just barely evaded the strike from the sky and fell into the woods behind him.

"C-calm down!"

Akuto ran while avoiding the slashes at his back.

"I refuse to listen to you!"

Definite killer's intent could be felt in how Junko wielded that wooden sword.

—If this keeps up, one of us is going to get hurt…

Akuto recalled what his teacher had told him. She had asked him to contact her in an emergency.

He pulled out his student handbook, quickly pressed his teacher's address with his fingers, and brought the handbook to his cheek.

"Hm? Are you having trouble?"

"Y-yes, sensei! I'm being attacked by Hattori-san!"

"Why were you anywhere near her?" asked Mitsuko-sensei in shock.

"I thought we could work this out!"

"Well, whatever. Do not let go of your student handbook. Your observer just arrived. As long as you have that handbook, the observer can trace your mana and go help you."

"Thank goodness!"

Akuto glanced over his shoulder while gasping for breath.

Junko must have been in good shape because she was easily keeping up with him. Akuto had built up his leg strength in his delivery job, so Junko had to have quite a bit of stamina.

"How long until this observer arrives?"

"I don't know… It should be soon, though. A sensible observer will teleport there," said Mitsuko-sensei before ending the telepathic connection.

"S-sensei…"

Just as Akuto said that, the ground suddenly disappeared from beneath his feet.

"Eh?"

He suddenly felt like he was floating and then like he was falling.

The trees of the forest had hidden an upcoming cliff.

He heard repeated sounds of trees rustling and impacts struck his body along with each noise. Finally, an even greater impact struck his back. For an instant, he stopped breathing and all feelings left his body. Soon afterwards, a dull pain filled his entire body.

Part 3

"Uuh…Kh…"

Akuto groaned and sucked in air while looking around to assess his situation. He seemed to be in a bamboo grove. Beech trees had been growing atop the cliff and bamboo had started growing where they stopped.

—If this bamboo was cut, I might have been impaled. I was lucky. And this helped me escape from Hattori-san. If I just wait, will this observer arrive?

However, Junko would probably find him if he simply stayed where he was. Akuto made sure he had no serious injuries on his arms and legs before heading deeper into the bamboo grove.

—What a pain. But at least this did not develop into anything too serious. Having no one on my side makes everything a lot harder. I hope this observer will change that.

While complaining silently, Akuto walked aimlessly.

Suddenly, he noticed a figure. He could only see the person's silhouette because the setting sun lay directly beyond them.

He initially took a defensive stance, but decided this was not Junko when the figure did not immediately charge at him. When he gave a relieved sigh, the figure seemed to notice him.

"Who is this that has come to visit me?"

It was a girl's voice. An incredibly carefree girl's voice.

"Actually, who are you? Are you my observer?"

He seriously doubted that was possible, but he received an affirmation.

"Yes. I am your observer."

"I'm saved. You came to meet me, right?" asked Akuto.

The lively girl's voice reverberated throughout the bamboo grove in response.

"Yes, although I do not know if you came to me or I came to you. This must be destiny! Are you my prince? Is your lovely face and body so scratched up because you passed through the forest of thorns to meet me?"

—This observer has an interesting way of putting things. I suppose this academy is something like a forest of thorns for me.

"Yes, I did. This has been a difficult time. I was waiting for you. From your voice, I assume you are a girl, but you will protect me as my observer, right?"

"You wish for my protection? Yes, I suppose protecting their prince has become the duty of girls in recent years. And I am your observer! I am the one who observes this academy and this entire world. I observe the

changing of the seasons and the changes in the people living through those seasons! The flow of history is so entrancing and amazing, don't you think?"

"Does an observer really have to be so poetic?"

—This is really weird…

"Yes, I am an observer. I am your observer."

The observer's voice was so lighthearted it almost seemed she was singing. In fact, she truly did began singing as she walked up to Akuto.

Her long hair fluttered in front of Akuto's eyes. Akuto felt like she had taken a piece of the setting sun with her. Her hair was a brilliant red and a few strands of hair stood up on the top of her head. Those strands shook back and forth like flickering flames.

"Now, my prince, what would you have me do?"

She was wearing the school's uniform. She lifted the skirt up slightly in greeting.

"Could you not call me your prince? Also, I'm in a bit of trouble. You know the situation, right?"

"There is a lot that can describe this situation. What I know is that you are injured and you came to me. That is enough to tell me you are in trouble."

The girl clenched her fist and looked up.

Her expression was surprisingly relaxed for the amount of spirit she was giving this. Her expression was focused, yet it gave off a kind impression. Her face was a bit too gentle to call her beautiful, but she did provide a sense of security and good will. Akuto felt he would grow sleepy if he looked at her face for too long.

"As long as you realize the danger of this-…"

Akuto was cut off by a long shout.

"There you aaaaaarrrrrrreeeeeee!"

Akuto took up a defensive pose.

"Oh, dear," said the red-haired girl leisurely as she looked between Akuto's expression and where Junko had appeared in the bamboo grove. She finally turned to Akuto with her overly gentle expression. "You're right. That is dangerous. But I will protect you."

—Oh? She doesn't seem concerned.

Akuto had thought something was off about this girl, but he finally began to believe she was his observer.

The girl walked confidently towards Junko. She gallantly held up a magic wand.

"Out of the way, you idiot! What do you think you're doing!?" shouted Junko towards the girl.

The red-haired girl spread her arms and gave a resolute reply.

"I will not move! He is precious to me!"

Her voice was as serious as someone protecting their lover.

Junko's look of anger changed from red to a dark black.

She looked Akuto in the eye and shouted, "Damn you! Do you target every girl you see!?"

"You've got it all wrong! I only just met her here!"

"I know that! I am asking if you seduced this girl you only just met!"

Junko swung up her wooden sword and charged towards Akuto. However, the red-haired girl moved to block her path.

"Out of the way!"

"No!"

Whether she moved to the right or left, Junko found that red-haired girl's face in front of her. Growing even more furious, Junko jumped backwards once and stared straight forward with her sword held vertically.

"Then I must slip past you!"

For an instant, Junko closed her eyes to focus. The instant she reopened them, her body surprisingly split into two.

Akuto could not believe his eyes. It appeared that there were now two identical Junkos. They moved separately as if they were twins rather than reflections.

"This is a type of magic passed down in my family! One of these is a fake, but that fake has the same attack power as the real one!"

The two Junkos ran to the right and left to circle around the red-haired girl.

Akuto was unsure what to do because he did not know how the red-haired girl would respond. One of the two Junkos would undoubtedly slip past her, but he could not plan his defense without knowing which one. Akuto followed the Junkos while keeping the red-haired girl in the corner of his vision.

—This observer is an expert fighter, so she should act firs-…Eh?

"Eh? Eh?"

The red-haired girl twisted her head to the left and right in confusion.

Both Junkos slipped past her in no time at all. The two of them sidestepped simultaneously to put themselves in equal distances from either side of Akuto. They were planning to attack with perfectly simultaneous attacks he could not hope to defend against.

"Cheaaahhh!" "Daaaahhh!"

The two vigorously approached Akuto from both sides.

—Eh? So is she not my observer? Do I have to handle this myself? Then I need to dodge the right one…and defend against the left one!

With that decided, Akuto took up the proper defensive pose. Even with simultaneous attacks from the left and right, he could predict the path of the coming attacks because Junko's actions were simple ones based on anger.

—If I time it right, I can dodge thi-…Wah!

While trying to judge his timing, Akuto's feet were suddenly knocked out from under him. This "attack" had come from an unexpected direction. The red-haired girl had suddenly embraced him in what essentially amounted to a tackle.

"I'll protect you!"

"Ehhh!?"

This further surprised Akuto, but it was so sudden he could do nothing but collapse to the ground with the red-haired girl.

The two Junkos mercilessly swung down their wooden swords towards where the two lay collapsed in an embrace. There was no avoiding it.

Akuto tried to tear the red-haired girl from him, but she was clinging to him too tightly.

—I have to stop both swords…but if I fail, this girl will be the one hit. The only way to ensure I stop them is to break the swords.

Akuto decided to break the wooden swords with his arms. The idea came to him because the feeling from earlier still lingered in his arms. He felt the same hot mass rising up his arms as when he had grabbed that wooden sword. He felt he could do the same without the sword.

—If I can control this power and make it explode…

For an instant, Akuto focused his mind.

—I need to draw that power out into empty air instead of into a sword!

The two swords swung down simultaneously from the right and left.

"Hah!"

Akuto swung up his arms. He felt a mass of heat flowing up through his arms. Akuto made that energy explode in the center of his motionless arms.

An intense flow of power burst from his arms.

"Ee!" "Eh!?"

The wooden swords were knocked back by the light emitted from Akuto's arms and the two Junkos cried out simultaneously.

When Akuto poured in more power, the glowing of his arms increased and the swords broke in two. A smile appeared on Akuto's face.

—It worked…

But then…

—Eh!? I-it won't stop!

Akuto panicked. He could no longer control the power.

Just like in the classroom, an explosion burst out from Akuto's arms. However, this one was much larger.

"Kyaahhh!" screamed a single Junko.

The false Junko had been disintegrated into nothingness by the explosion.

A sphere of light expanded further and further. After a short delay, a great explosive noise rang out.

Clouds swelled up in the distance due to the heat.

Once his vision cleared, Akuto was finally able to see the aftermath. It looked like a battlefield or the site of a meteorite strike.

A crater about 5 meters across had been created around Akuto and the bamboo around its edge had been mowed down. Junko lay collapsed in the crater. Her uniform had been badly torn and she appeared to be injured.

"Uh, oh…" muttered Akuto.

Unlike before, he had been so focused on breaking the swords that Junko had been caught in the blast. He was overcome with regret.

He tried to get up, but the red-haired girl was still lying on top of him. She seemed dumbfounded by the explosion, but Akuto's movement seemed to bring her to her senses because she suddenly looked around.

"A-all this damage!"

The red-haired girl looked frightened.

"Oh, s-sorr-…"

Akuto opened his mouth to calm her down, but her intense reaction was not at all what he had expected.

"I-I'm sorry!" she shouted. "Ahh! How could this happen!? My hidden power must have awakened! My violent power awakened to save us from this crisis!"

Akuto blankly stared up at the red-haired girl who brought her hands to her cheeks and shook her head with the expressions of the protagonist of a tragedy.

"U-um… That's not what…"

"Oh! You are attempting to console me! Thank you, kind boy! But I have hurt someone! Is my only option to spend the rest of my life serving the

god Ko Ro in the clergy? Even my whole life may not be enough to make up for this sin…"

"Sh-she's not dead yet… Wait, we need to help her!"

Just as Akuto started panicking, something else happened out of the blue.

A few meters away from where they lay collapsed on the ground, a shimmer appeared in the air as if from heat haze. That shimmer quickly took shape and a transparent rectangular object appeared fixed in the air. It was as if a panel of glass had appeared in midair.

That "glass panel" then "opened" like it was a door. Surprisingly, a hand appeared from "inside".

The hand was the soft, slender hand of a girl. With a comment of "there we go", a cute, slender girl appeared through the narrow door.

In other words, this girl suddenly appeared out of thin air as if she had forced her way out of that transparent space.

She appeared to be the same age as Akuto. Her slender frame was contained in the school's uniform. She had green hair and green eyes. She was beautiful, but no expression could be seen on her face. Akuto immediately realized she was not human.

—A L'Isle-Adam!

Akuto was shocked. L'Isle-Adams were the androids rumored to only be owned by those at the very top of society.[1] Their bodies were constructed using mana, so they could move and think like a human but had no emotions.

"You are Sai Akuto-san, correct? I am your observer. My ID name is Korone. I was given my mission on the instructions of the god Markt three minutes ago."

Korone bowed to Akuto. The movement and the shaking of her abundant hair were both identical to a human's, but the expression on her face was that of a doll. Akuto was unsure on how to respond.

—So this is the real observer…

While he was left confused, Korone glanced to the left and right.

"This situation occurred in the past three minutes, so it is my responsibility. I will ask you and Hattori Junko about your dispute after she has been healed." She stuck her hand into the bag hanging at her waist and pulled out a white device shaped like a handgun. "I do not have her consent, but I will proceed to heal her under the authority provided by medical laws."

Korone walked over to Junko and pressed the end of the handgun-shaped device against Junko while she groaned in pain. The device emitted mana light. The blood and dirt remained, but Junko's injuries gradually disappeared.

"Healing complete. Some foreign substances including germs have entered her body. I predict she will experience a fever and fatigue. I recommend she gets bed rest," said Korone as she stood up.

It seemed Junko had come to. However, her expression changed to a bitter one as soon as she saw Akuto. Two trails of tears flowed down from her almond-shaped eyes.

"Ah…!"

Akuto tried to call out to Junko, but she quickly covered the front of her half-destroyed clothes and ran off crying.

"W-wait!"

Akuto tried to stand up, but the red-haired girl was still on top of his stomach. He lay back down on the ground and looked up at the heavens in that foolish pose.

"I will question her later. I will start with you."

Korone peered down at Akuto's face.

"You're my observer…?'

"Please call me Korone. I will be attending school as your classmate starting tomorrow to protect you from situations such as this. But first I must question you about this conflict. This is what I understand of the situation: Hattori Junko grew agitated at your contact with her, a fight broke out, you fled, and she was lightly injured in the subsequent battle. I wish to determine your intentions during this battle. Did you intend to injure Hattori Junko?" asked Korone in a calm tone.

Her overly businesslike attitude left Akuto dumbfounded, but he resigned himself to the fact that this was simply how L'Isle-Adams were.

"I did not intend to injure her. I was trying to break her wooden swor-…"

But before he could finish, someone else spoke from right next to him…or rather, directly above him.

"No! This was because my power awakened!" insisted the red-haired girl in the same tone of voice as ever.

"W-wait," cut in Akuto, but the red-haired girl was not listening.

"I caused that explosion. Ahh, what am I supposed to do!? This is a sin, isn't it? It has to be! What do I need to do to be forgiven?"

"I will investigate it after hearing everyone's testimony. I have limited administrative rights to make limited communications with my god."

"You can communicate with your god! Oh, no! That means you can't make a mistake! Will you forgive me?"

"As I said, I will investigate that after hearing everyone's testimony," replied Korone diligently. Then again, she was never anything other than diligent.

"Oh! I was only trying to protect him, my prince, as his observer! Please believe me!" begged the red-haired girl.

"H-hey, wait! You're making way too many assumptions here."

Akuto tried to interrupt again, but had no luck once more.

"I was protecting him as his observer!"

"I am seeing a discrepancy between your testimony and the current situation. I am also seeing a discrepancy between your testimony and Sai Akuto's. Your testimony will be recorded on the official record. You can be charged for perjury, so be careful," announced Korone. Light flashed deep in her eyes for a few seconds before she added, "My query shows that you are Soga Keena of Year 1 Class A in this academy's high school."

"P-perjury!? M-more crimes!? Oh, I don't even know what to do anymore! First I injure the class rep in an explosion and now this! And how do you know my name!?"

The red haired girl, Keena, was in a state of complete disorder.

As she twisted her body around the top of Akuto's stomach, her skirt was flipped up and her panties began rubbing roughly against Akuto.

"Wait…"

Akuto's face grew red.

And then Keena realized what position she was in.

"N-nooo!"

She rolled off of Akuto. However, she had rolled onto the ground with her legs spread wide in an M-shape. When she realized this left her panties fully visible, she frantically hid them with her hands.

"Uuh…"

She looked up at Akuto with a blush of embarrassment and tears welling up in her eyes.

"S-sorr-…"

Akuto tried to apologize, but Keena suddenly ran off.

"H-hey, wait!"

When she did not stop after he called out to her, Akuto ran after her. The bamboo grove obstructed his view somewhat, but there was not anywhere she could completely hide herself. It should have been impossible to lose her, but Keena completely disappeared after she jumped behind a thick group of bamboo. He should have only lost sight of her for an instant, but she was nowhere to be seen. When he made his away to where she had disappeared.

"Huh?"

However, Akuto found something surprising when he looked down. He found a school uniform. He picked it up and found it was the same one Keena had been wearing. It was still warm. He looked down again and found a blouse on the ground a bit further on. And a bit beyond that he found some panties.

—Wh-what is going on?

Akuto was confused. He approached the panties, but he hesitated to pick them up. As he stared at the white panties that had some unfamiliar character printed on them, he heard a voice mutter "No!" from nearby.

"Eh?"

He looked around, but found no one.

However, he spotted a small light floating in midair. This was not something emitting light. This insect-sized object was reflecting the setting sun. It was floating just above Akuto's eye level.

—Is that a stone?

Akuto watched the small stone floating in midair, but it began flying away from him an instant later.

"She disappeared. I would like to pursue her, but I cannot determine her location. Unfortunately, it seems Soga Keena left her student handbook in the dorm," said Korone as she approached him from behind.

"You can tell where she is if she has her student handbook?"

"Yes, assuming she does not manipulate the mana and keep the disturbance to a minimum. The reason I was so late is because you used mana in an attempt to hide yourself."

"I did nothing of the sort."

"You may have done so subconsciously because you were trying to escape. The same may be the case for Soga Keena at the moment. I cannot trace her mana. Although she may be doing it intentionally."

"Intentionally?"

"It seems she can hide her mana disturbance."

"That's amazing, but why are her clothes here?"

"I do not know."

"Just what is going on…?"

Part 4

Akuto fell silent for a while. He started to feel it was odd for him to be speaking with Korone so normally.

"So…what am I supposed to do?"

Korone's response was quite clear.

"Please live your life normally."

"…Normally?"

"Yes. I was instructed to ensure your freedom and safety as much as possible. That is what it means to both observe and protect you."

"What if I do something bad?"

"I have been ordered to immediately provide an appropriate punishment," said Korone carelessly.

—I get the feeling that should scare me…

The reason he was not scared may have been due to her outward appearance.

"So what about this incident?"

"I have confirmed that you had no intention of injuring Hattori Junko. I have the authority to trace the mana within your body. You gave me permission when you agreed to my presence. For that reason, I can analyze your emotions back to a few minutes ago."

"So you know what I was thinking?"

"Only your emotions. For the past few minutes, you have primarily experienced confusion. You also felt pity and slight sexual arousal."

"Y-you don't have to point that out!"

Akuto raised his voice, but Korone remained calm.

"If it is necessary to my mission, I cannot accept such a command."

"…I see."

"However, I have been ordered to ensure your freedom in your everyday life. Eliminating any dangers is essential. For that reason, I advise you to be careful in your relationship with Hattori Junko. Soga Keena has also committed a crime. It is a trivial crime, so it can be overlooked. However, if she continues impersonating an official observer, she must be punished."

Akuto was unsure how to respond to that.

"I'm not sure I understand, but she is my classmate too, right?"

"Yes. According to the attendance record, Soga Keena was absent today. That is why you did not meet her until now."

"Then will I be able to meet her tomorrow?"

"Such predictions are impossible for me."

"That is not what I meant… I'm just wondering if I can return her clothes."

Akuto pointed at the clothes scattered on the ground.

"They can be brought to the manager of the girls' dorm. Such a task would cause trouble for you, so I will handle it." Korone began gathering the clothes. "Now, I will take these to her dorm. I will then escort you to your dorm."

Akuto nodded, but something she said caught in his mind.

—Escort me to my dorm?

He quickly received his answer.

After they dropped the clothes off at the girls' dorm, Akuto returned to the boys' dorm, but Korone remained directly behind him.

The boys in the dorm naturally began muttering amongst themselves. Girls almost never entered so boldly, so seeing a strange and beautiful L'Isle-Adam sneaking in was truly a rare sight.

The dorm hallway was filled with people muttering comments along the lines of, "Akuto's done it again!"

"Um…If you don't mind me asking, just how far are you going to stick with me?"

Korone replied while paying the onlookers no heed.

"If it seems you might try to escape, I will accompany you into the bathroom and bath. If not, you may have your privacy there, but I will stay with you everywhere else."

That only increased the chatter among the students. Korone then raised her hand to call in a Speaker. She gave an announcement that resounded throughout the dorm.

"Good evening, dorm residents. I apologize for the interruption. I am an observer dispatched by the imperial government. Please call me Korone. My mission is to observe Sai Akuto and I hope I may have your cooperation. It may be improper to have a female-type in the boys' dorm,

but this form was chosen to put Sai Akuto at ease. We respect the privacy of others, so do not worry. However, please do not consider attacking me. I have been granted the right to resist or provide immediate punishment."

Korone's announcement brought silence to the dorm.

"Um, when you say you respect our privacy, do you mean you will not tell anyone what you see here?" nervously asked a courageous student nearby.

Korone nodded and said, "Correct. Sai Akuto's privacy will also be protected to an extent. I will be staying in the same room as him, but I will not speak of what happens in that room. Thank you for your time."

That response caused another round of muttering.

She had said she would stay with Akuto, but it seemed that meant she was even going to live in the same room.

Strange looks that could be seen as envious and pitying turned towards Akuto.

"Y-you really are amazing, aniki!" said Hiroshi as he hurriedly ran over.

He was the only one who was excited in a positive way.

"Amazing? Are you sure you understand the situation?"

"She may be your observer, but this still means you have a L'Isle-Adam. That's just amazing, aniki!"

Akuto tried to deny it, but Hiroshi only grew more excited.

In the meantime, dinnertime came. While Akuto ate, Korone stood behind him without moving an inch.

"Um…Korone-san? Are you just going to just stand there?" asked Akuto hesitantly.

He could not help but be bothered by it.

"No seat has been prepared for me and I do not eat," replied Korone.

Hearing that, Hiroshi stood up and brought a spare chair over in the blink of an eye.

"Here you go!"

Korone stared at it and asked, "Are you telling me to sit there?"

"Yes?" replied Hiroshi in confusion.

Korone fell silent. She was as expressionless as ever, but it almost made her look perplexed in this situation. After a few seconds, she opened her mouth to speak.

"You are being kind," said Korone as if she finally understood. "My analysis shows that this action is normally done in hopes of receiving a sexual favor in return. However, I do not have the authority to analyze your feelings, so I must assume that is not the case and give my thanks. Thank you."

Korone gave a quick bow and sat in the chair.

Hiroshi gave a bitter smile and replied, "Y-you're welcome…"

After dinner, Akuto returned to his room, but Korone followed him as if it was to be expected. He could not help but feel uncomfortable.

"Um…do you have to come into my room?"

"I see. If you do not wish me to, I will not enter your room."

Akuto was relieved at Korone's surprising obedience.

"I would rather you didn't. You can find somewhere else to sleep. The dorm mother might find you a place if you ask."

Akuto opened the door and entered the room. Korone did not follow.

"See you tomorrow."

With that parting comment, he closed the door. He sat on the bed and sighed.

A lot had happened and he was sure tomorrow would have its fair share of troubles.

—Hattori-san and Soga-san…

Akuto held his head in his hands, but he was suddenly overcome by an odd feeling. He felt a presence outside his door. And it felt like he was being watched.

Akuto opened the door.

He saw green eyes.

Korone was standing right in front of the door.

She was expressionless and motionless.

Akuto closed the door.

He waited a few seconds and opened it again.

Korone was standing right in front of the door. She had not moved at all.

He closed the door.

He opened it.

Korone was standing there.

Close.

Open.

Korone.

"Are you going to stand there until morning?" asked Akuto once he could not stand it anymore.

Korone nodded and carelessly said, "Yes. I must observe you even if I do not enter your room."

"You don't get tired?"

"No," said Korone.

"…Fine. Come in."

Akuto had given in.

"Then I will enter."

With no signs of delight, Korone entered the room.

Akuto sighed and sat back down on the bed.

Korone stood right in front of him and stared at him.

"……"

"……"

"……
……"

"……
……."

"……
……Hey.
"

"Yes?"

"You don't get tired?"

"No."

"This is doing a lot to interfere with my freedom, so can you act more like a normal roommate?" asked Akuto with a bitter smile.

Korone fell silent as if lost in thought.

"……"

"What is it?" he asked.

Korone looked up suddenly and said, "My apologies. I simply do not know how a normal roommate acts."

"I guess that isn't too surprising. You don't have emotions, right?"

"No, I do," she unexpectedly said.

"Eh?'

"I have emotions. If I did not, I could not analyze human emotions. To be technical, it is a sense of self that we lack," explained Korone.

"A sense of self?"

"We only have an identity telling us who we are while on a mission. It is the sense of self that determines whether it is necessary to display our emotions. The longer a mission lasts, the more that sense of self sets in place. It is only after that begins to happen that our emotions begin to show themselves."

"Th-that sounds confusing."

"It means this might be somewhat inconvenient for you until I grow used to this mission," explained Korone.

"Will you be able to show emotions once you get used to it?"

That was how he had interpreted it.

"Yes," she affirmed. "However, I require advice on how to act for the moment."

"Um… I usually sit in the chair or the bed. When I have nothing else to do, I sleep," said Akuto.

"Understood."

"I'll take my bath tomorrow morning, so I'm going to bed. You should get to sleep too."

"I see."

Akuto removed his outer clothes and lay down in his bed. Korone then lay down next to him.

Akuto faced to the side and Korone's face was right in front of him. They stared at each other.

She smelled exactly like a real girl.

Akuto felt his heart race, but Korone's expression remained unchanged.

"…Hey."

"Yes?"

"If you lie here, it will be hard to sleep…"

"I see. Are you experiencing sexual arousal?"

"D-don't read my emotions!" protested Akuto.

Korone quickly stood up and stared down at him.

With the same expressionless look, she said, "That was a joke."

"…Eh?"

Akuto was confused, but he caught sight of Korone looking up at the ledge near the ceiling.

"Oh, it appears there is nothing in that storage space. I will sleep there."

Korone skillfully opened the cover to the shelf and climbed up and inside.

—I-I don't think I can let my guard down just because she isn't human…

Akuto could only feel puzzled.

He decided to go to sleep, so he shut his eyes.

"……
……"

However, he felt a disturbing atmosphere, so he opened them once more. He looked up at the shelf near the ceiling. The cover was open a crack and two green eyes were staring out at him.

"…Hey."

"Yes?"

"…Are you teasing me?"

"A bit."

"……"

"……"

"……
……"

"……
……"

"……
……Hey."

"Yes?"

"Are you having fun?"

"A bit."

"…That's good."

"Yes."

—I-I don't understand her… I don't understand her at all…

Akuto pulled the blanket up over his head.

Chapter 3: The Slightly Frightening Upperclassman

Part 1

After waking up from an odd dream, Akuto stared up at the ceiling feeling unable to calm down.

He had dreamed of his childhood. Nostalgic and bittersweet images filled his head. He seemed to remember something about a small jewel glittering in the sunlight, but he could not remember what exactly his dream had been about.

"What was that…?" muttered Akuto.

He had always been an early riser. He checked the clock on his desk and found it was still 5:30.

It was not worth going back to sleep, so he stood up and stretched. But then he froze in place

"Good morning."

"…Good morning."

Korone's green eyes were staring at him from the exact same position as the previous night.

"Were you doing this all night?"

"Yes."

"You don't get tired?"

"Of course not."

"But…oh, never mind."

Akuto gave up on asking questions.

Korone jumped down from the shelf she used as a bed. Her movements were much more splendid than a normal girl could manage, and she landed lightly on the floor.

"By the way," said Korone suddenly. "What did you mean by 'what was that…?'?"

"I had a dream. I was trying to remember something from a long time ago, but I could not quite recall."

"If you wish to search your memories, I can help you. I might be able to find something in your brain."

"No thank you. Anyway, I will be heading to the bath."

Akuto made his preparations. The notice he had been given regarding bath times had said morning baths were allowed. He left his room and Korone followed.

"I'm taking a bath."

"I know that."

"…Um."

"That was a joke. I will wait in front of the dressing room," said Korone expressionlessly.

Akuto entered the dressing room in relief.

A few others must have been taking a morning bath because he saw a few sets of clothes in the baskets. He removed his clothes and entered the bath. The two boys casually taking a bath looked displeased when they saw him. They were the two who had tried to pick a fight the day before when Hiroshi was making a big deal about Akuto.

Akuto too felt this could become troublesome, but his only option was to try to work things out here.

"Hello."

With that greeting, he began washing his body. The duo spoke up in a tone of voice that was anything but gentle.

"Hey, we heard you defeated Class A's class rep."

Akuto was unsure how to respond, so he shrugged and kept it vague.

"It was an accident."

"Don't be like that. We're trying to be nice."

"You have an odd way of showing it."

Akuto grew a bit belligerent, but then he realized the duo was acting a bit differently from the day before.

"That was because we didn't know about this yesterday. If you really did defeat that class rep…no, just the rumor is enough. At any rate, you need to be careful."

They were still making a threat, but it seemed there was fear of something or someone at the base of it. In a way, they were giving him an honest warning.

"Are you saying someone is going to try to pick a fight with me?"

"No." Both of the boys shook their heads. "We're saying that class rep was truly strong. She was at the top of the third years in the middle school last year."

"What do you mean by at the top? Aren't we talking about getting into fights?" asked Akuto in confusion.

The duo took turns explaining an unexpected side to the academy.

"We may be in no position to speak, but this school has a lot of violent people in it."

"That's why the students have an official and unofficial system of ensuring order."

"The official system is the standard school rules, but the unofficial one is a ranking of our strength in fights using magic. It's unofficial so there are no clear rules or anything, but it gets talked about a lot by idiots and good-for-nothing students."

—So it's like the delinquents in a normal school… And with magic as an option, the girls might even be a part of this…

With that thought, Akuto finally spoke.

"So what about the class rep? What about Hattori-san?"

"She was ranked at #2. Those on the underside of this school – that would be black magic adherents or any other students who use magic to do bad things – hate that class rep. She's only managed to do what she's done because of how powerful she is."

It sounded ridiculous, but Akuto understood what they were getting at.

"So true or not, this rumor is going to make people think I'm ranked higher than the class rep?"

The duo nodded as if to say, "He's finally catching on."

"Yes. That's how people are viewing this. We aren't about to try our luck against someone like you, but be careful. Some people are aiming for reaching the #1 spot."

"Don't be ridiculous. I don't want anything to do with this. And don't forget that I have a L'Isle-Adam from the imperial government watching over me."

The two cut in at that point.

"There are plenty of ways around that. At any rate, just be careful. And like you said last time we met, you can just view us as your fans. If you defeat enough people to start taking over this school, we'll join your side."

Both of them patted Akuto's naked back.

"So you just go with whoever seems to be winning?"

"Yes. Anything wrong with that?"

The duo washed themselves off and left the bath.

"Oh, wait," Akuto called out.

"What?"

"Who is #1? You said Hattori-san was #2."

"Well…" They lowered their voices. "No one knows."

"No one knows?"

"That's right. Only first and second years are ranked because third years are gone so often trying to find a job…but no one knows who is ranked at #1. This has never happened before."

"#3 was badly beaten by whoever it is, so he has to know. He gets really scared whenever the topic is brought up though, so he refuses to say who it was."

"That's crazy," groaned Akuto.

"But it's true."

"Well, I wouldn't try looking into it if I were you," added the second one. "Whoever it is might come to you, though."

With a smile, the duo shut the door to the bath.

Akuto immediately heard a deep male voice shout "Hey, don't look!", but he ignored it. Korone had to be peeking into the dressing room. As further evidence, another voice shouted, "Don't laugh expressionlessly like that! It sounds like you're saying mine is small!"

—This is a crazy school… A-anyway, what do I need to do to ensure I have a peaceful school life? I hope I can manage something with some help from Hattori-san, but after yesterday… And even if I apologize, Korone will probably ban me from seeing her. This is a problem. But the situation will only get worse if I don't make up with Hattori-san.

Akuto let out a long sigh as he soaked in the tub.

After ten minutes of soaking, he washed off his body, carefully wrapped a towel around his lower body, and then entered the dressing room. Korone had the door to the hallway cracked open and was peering in through the gap.

"Why do humans care so much about penis sizes?" she asked.

A normal boy would have been left speechless with that question, but Akuto was an expert at giving diligent answers.

"I think it is because it allows more opportunities to reproduce and therefore more descendants. You view someone with a larger one as a threat because you expect their descendants will wipe out your own. That's what I've heard anyway," explained Akuto with a serious expression.

"I see. Then please show me your penis. I will compare it with any other male's penis I see and announce their comparative sizes."

"…That isn't happening. Wait, are you teasing me?"

"A bit," replied Korone expressionlessly before Akuto drove her out of the dressing room.

Part 2

"Aniki! Let's go to school together!"

Hiroshi came running up when Akuto left the dorm.

"Go to school together? But it's right over there."

"Don't say that. I already decided I would accompany you even this short distance," replied Hiroshi flippantly.

He must have already gotten used to Korone because he greeted her as well.

"By the way, are you pretty well informed about the goings-on of this school?" asked Akuto.

Hiroshi must have been overcome with emotion over having Akuto rely on him because he grabbed Akuto's hand with tears welling up in his eyes.

"Please ask me anything!"

"Um…This is not anything that important. It's just that I heard the school has an unofficial ranking system."

Hiroshi immediately replied, "Yes! You are ranked at #2, aniki! It's amazing! I had no idea you were heading out to challenge her to a duel yesterday! I was certain you were in love with her! I never would have thought you were tricking her into letting her guard down so you could defeat her!"

—He's probably the one that started the rumor… I guess that shouldn't surprise me.

"That's not what happened. Forget about all that. A-anyway, is it true no one knows who is ranked #1?"

"Yes! Oh, I get it, aniki! You're working your way to the top so you can conquer the entire school! You may try to deny it, but you're really motivated about this! Are you asking me to look into who it is? I'll do it! I'll do it!"

"N-no. I heard that's dangerous, so you don't have to. I just wondered if you knew."

"R-really? But you can ask anything of me!"

Hiroshi seemed overcome with emotions once more as he looked up into the sky.

"You appear to have a lot of issues. I will not interfere, but I will punish you if you commit any violent acts," warned Korone.

"So if I am attacked, I just have to take it?"

"No. If they attack first, your actions will not be punished."

"So that's how it works," said Akuto with a bitter smile.

Suddenly, he heard a crowd muttering around him. All of the students used this path into school, so it was only natural for him to gather attention. However, this seemed different. He turned around to see what was happening and found a shockingly beautiful girl standing there.

Her hair that reached all the way down to her waist was well groomed and it felt like music should start playing when the wind blew through it. Her eyes looked like they were seeing a dream rather than reality and she had a kind smile on her lips. Akuto felt like the perfect example of a high-class girl was standing before him.

"Y-you are this academy's top madonna, Etou Fujiko-sama!"

Hiroshi's over-explanatory comment told Akuto exactly who this was. What he did not know was why the girl was standing behind him.

"Good day," she said in greeting.

Fujiko did not bow her head to Akuto. Her lapel pin indicated she was an upperclassman.

"Good morning," said Akuto with a bow.

"U-um, what do you want with aniki?" asked Hiroshi.

Fujiko brought her hand to her mouth and laughed.

"Excuse me for speaking to you so suddenly. I am the dormitory leader for the girls' dormitory."

"The dorm leader?"

Akuto was shocked. At the same time, he realized she must be here to complain about what happened the night before.

"Yes. It seems you brought Soga-san's clothes to the dormitory yesterday," said Fujiko in a gentle voice.

"Oh, that was actually Korone…"

Akuto was surprised his assumptions about her purpose here was incorrect. He pointed at Korone and she nodded before giving a whispered explanation to Akuto.

"Yesterday, I met with Dormitory Leader Etou and explained to her the situation regarding Soga Keena's clothes and Hattori Junko's injuries. She was the dormitory leader, so I had to give her an accurate report."

—That means Etou-senpai called out to me despite knowing the general situation. She must be a nice person…and she certainly is pretty. Come to think of it, she might help me regarding Hattori-san.

Akuto bowed once more and spoke quietly to Fujiko.

"Um, could we speak regarding Hattori-san at some point?"

Fujiko brought a hand to her cheek in apparent confusion, but replied in a whisper of her own.

"Regarding Hattori-san? What do you mean?"

Only Korone and Hiroshi could overhear them.

"The thing is…I want to make up with her, but meeting with her directly would only cause more trouble."

Akuto glanced over at Korone and Korone cut in to say, "I do not recommend a direct meeting with Hattori Junko."

"In that case, leave it to me. I can pass on a message for you. After seeing the actions you have taken, I think there is no chance that you will become a demon king."

"Th-thank you so much!" exclaimed Akuto with another bow.

"This is nothing worth bowing over. Now, have a good day."

Fujiko passed by Akuto. He, Hiroshi, and Korone were left blankly watching Fujiko's receding back.

"Oh, wow! Fujiko-sama is so graceful!" shouted Hiroshi out of overwhelming emotion.

"Honestly," complained Akuto as he watched Hiroshi.

Just as he began to walk, he felt something in his uniform pocket.

"?"

A piece of paper had been placed inside.

—Only Etou-senpai could have put this here.

After making sure Hiroshi and Korone had not seen it, Akuto pushed the paper further into his pocket to hide it.

"You really are amazing, aniki! Even Fujiko-sama is speaking with you!"

"Cut that out already…"

He drove Hiroshi away and arrived at school. Unsurprisingly, he was the center of attention when he entered the classroom. The destruction of the classroom was more than just a recent event. Workers were currently in the process of repairing the classroom walls. It also seemed a rumor had spread saying Akuto had defeated the class representative using underhanded means, so the girls glared at him coldly.

—Living like this is going to be depressing.

Both Junko and Keena were absent. Their desks were empty despite this being the first day after the opening ceremony.

"Good morning, everyone." said Mitsuko-sensei as she entered the classroom. "I see Hattori-san and Soga-san are our only absences. With that, let's begin the lesson."

Mitsuko-sensei, their homeroom teacher, began a review lesson covering the basics of magic. This was the first time Akuto had heard most of it, so he was very curious.

"It is possible to summon the effects of magic by manipulating magic with one's mental state. The mana in one's body and the mana in the air are exactly the same, but they are viewed as separate. For this reason, people are divided between those who specialize in controlling internal mana and those who specialize in controlling external mana. That is why, on the surface, there appears to be two different categories of magic. In addition, the spell user's personality can be seen in the method of moving mana. There are four categories here: energy waves, healing, necromancy, and illusions. Each of those can be divided between internal and external, so that creates a total of 8 categories of magic. If these are drawn up into a matrix, you can see which spells you will do well with and which types of spells you will have trouble with."

However, Akuto was also curious about the memo he had been handed. He made sure to write down everything the teacher said, but he could still

manage that while not thinking about what the words meant. While keeping his hand moving, he checked on Korone. She was sitting in a seat directly behind him, but she showed no signs of moving.

Akuto secretly pulled out the memo Fujiko had given him. Magical words were carved into the memo paper. It seemed Fujiko had written it out while speaking with him.

<Tonight, come alone to the old strategy room in the main school building's basement. The method to lose your L'Isle-Adam is simple. L'Isle-Adams have a tail and they can be turned off by pulling that tail.>

—Oh!? I didn't know that!

Akuto was surprised. And then he grew worried Korone had seen his surprise, so he quickly hid the memo.

—At any rate, Etou-senpai is the only one I can rely on now. I need to lose Korone tonight and head to the school's basement.

After that, he focused on the lesson. He double-checked his notes in the break between classes and spent the time until lunch break without speaking to anyone.

Once the lunch break arrived, Hiroshi invited him to the dining hall and he was unable to decline. Akuto was forced to go along with the boy, but he could not fully suppress a bit of anxiety welling up within his heart.

—Does she really have a tail that turns her off when you pull it?

His gaze naturally turned toward Korone's ass.

Korone was not human, so her body shape had been made into however her designer wanted. It seemed that the designer preferred slender asses. The tense bulge visible below her skirt was beautiful enough to charm even those who were not into slender women.

—I need to create a situation where I'm alone with her. That will happen naturally tonight, but what if the tail was just a joke by Etou-senpai? No, even if she was telling the truth, Korone is a L'Isle-Adam sent by the government. She might be a special model. I need to make sure before tonight. I want to try it out when no one else is watching. I can't just tell Etou-senpai I wasn't able to make it…

"Aniki? What's the matter?"

Hiroshi's words snapped Akuto out of his thoughts.

"Nothing… I was just thinking, that's all."

"About what? You can discuss anything with me."

"It was nothing."

He could hardly say he had been thinking about how to turn Korone off. However, this denial must have seemed suspicious to Hiroshi.

"No, I can tell something is still bothering you. I've known you for so long I can just tell!"

"You haven't even known me for two days… Oh, but there is one thing I wanted to know."

"What is it!?"

Akuto had decided to ask an arbitrary question to change the subject, but Hiroshi jumped at it too eagerly. For that reason, he asked something he had actually been wondering about.

"What kind of person is Soga-san?"

"You want to know that?" asked Hiroshi in surprise.

"I'm just curious because she's absent."

"You really are amazing, aniki! You want to make every last girl yours, don't you!?"

"Please, enough of that… So what kind of person is she?"

Akuto felt a bit embarrassed as he asked again. This was both due to the simple fact that he was showing an interest in a girl and because he felt an odd mixture of irritation and nostalgia when he thought about Keena.

"Well, she's a weird girl. She isn't anyone worth your attention, aniki. She isn't a bad girl, but she can't do anything with magic but fly. She has no magical talent at all. That's why she has no friends and does nothing but read books and get lost in strange fantasies."

"So how did she get into this school?"

"She's just really good at normal academics. But since she can't use magic, she's treated like a terrible student here."

"So that's it."

Akuto felt an affinity with Keena. Their positions were different yet somehow similar. While lost in that emotion, Hiroshi suddenly continued speaking.

"By the way, aniki."

"Hm?"

"If that's what you were thinking about, why were you staring at Korone-chan? Were you working out a way to make all the girls yours after all? So your plan includes making even your observer L'Isle-Adam yours!"

Hiroshi's excited voice rang out through the dining hall. Naturally, the students turned their attention Akuto's way with expressions that seemed to say, "Ahh…" or "That's what you get with a philanderer like him."

—Denying it would be useless…

Akuto bit his lip, but Korone suddenly spoke up.

"As an observer, I have been made to feel no emotions even if my observation target engages in sexual intercourse with me. Is there a problem?"

That frank comment caused the students in the dining hall to mutter amongst themselves and blush.

"No, there isn't! But could you stop making that kind of joke!" shouted Akuto.

"I cannot stop making jokes so they will likely continue in the future. Please smile and forgive me," replied Korone calmly.

"Wow! I don't really get it, but you're so amazing, aniki!" shouted Hiroshi excitedly.

Akuto had already resigned himself to a lot, but now he gave up even more.

"By the way," said Akuto after choosing curry and beginning to eat.

"Yes?" replied Hiroshi.

"Do you know where I could go to be alone? I can't stand how noisy everything is around here."

"Well…" Hiroshi thought with his chopsticks in his mouth. "Barely anyone goes to the mountain behind the school. It's a bit dangerous, but you should be fine."

"Dangerous?"

"No one goes there because there are monsters wandering around. They rarely appear, but when you enter that mountain, it's at your own risk."

"I see…"

Akuto checked the time. He still had half of the lunch break left. He quickly finished off the curry and stood up.

"Okay, I'll be going."

"I will accompany you, aniki!"

"No, don't. It's dangerous, remember?"

"But I want to go with you."

"I want somewhere to relax."

"But I will be going with you so you cannot be truly alone," pointed out Korone.

"Ah!" cried Hiroshi as he clapped his hands together in understanding. "Sorry. I didn't realize what you meant."

Hiroshi bowed down with a lewd grin on his face.

Akuto immediately realized what Hiroshi was getting at.

"It's not that!"

"Now, now, now."

Hiroshi began pushing Akuto and Korone out of the dining hall.

"W-wait a second…"

"Now, now, now."

After pushing the two of them completely out of the dining hall, Hiroshi pulled out a handkerchief and saw them off with a comment of, "Have fun."

"It really isn't that!"

Akuto tried to resist further, but Korone grabbed onto his sleeve. She purposefully brought a blush to her face.

"It is my first time, so be gentle."

"I told you to stop making that kind of joke!" shouted Akuto, but then he heard the comments from the other students.

"I guess it makes sense, a demon king would be a horrible person who can't control his libido."

"So the observer L'Isle-Adam also has to satisfy the demon king's out-of-control libido? I feel sorry for her even if she's an android."

"Damn that demon king. I'm so jeal…I mean, disgusted."

Akuto realized it was much too late to change his actions based on how others saw him.

"Oh, fine…"

Akuto began walking.

Part 3

"I do not know what your intentions are, but your actions have seriously backfired," said Korone calmly.

"You know… Aren't you affecting my life a lot for a supposed observer?"

"Am I?"

"Yes…"

Once they left the back entrance of the school building, they began passing by fewer students. It seemed Hiroshi had been right. They walked along a path made between the trees and soon could not hear any students' voices. A monster might appear, but it simply seemed like a quiet park walking path for the moment.

"I'm glad it's so calm here."

Akuto sat down and leaned up against a tree on the side of the path.

"I am glad you are glad," said Korone as she stood next to him.

"My life has gotten really noisy ever since you arrived," said Akuto as he looked up at her.

Korone was looking off into the distance and not paying Akuto any heed. Due to his low angle, he could almost see up her short skirt.

—This might be a good chance to see if she actually has a tail.

Akuto slowly slid his back down the tree he was leaning up against.

As the angle gradually changed, he began to catch glimpses of white panties from behind Korone. However, he needed to sink down much lower to see above her ass where a tail would be.

—J-just a bit further…

Akuto slid down until he was almost lying flat on the ground. He did not realize it, but a third party would have thought he was quite the pervert.

—A bit more…

And then…

"Ow!"

Someone punched the top of Akuto's head. That impact knocked him completely down to the ground and his head slid down directly underneath Korone's ass.

—Wh-what?

Akuto was taken aback, but he could see no one when he looked around.

"Is something the matter?" asked Korone.

"S-someone punched me…"

Akuto was blinking in an attempt to clear his head.

"No one is here."

"That's strange."

"What is strange is your position," said Korone in confusion.

Akuto was trying to look directly up at Korone's face, but her nicely shaped legs and ass were blocking his view. His head was sticking right between her legs.

"Ah…"

"You are quite the pervert," said Korone calmly.

She did hurriedly move out of the way, though. She had said she did have emotions, so she may have been embarrassed. But as she did, her skirt flipped up and Akuto got a clear view. Her panties were located well below her waist and a small rabbit-like tail was located just above them.

—Oh, she really does have a tail.

He kept his admiring comment to himself.

"Did you come out here to look at my panties? What a strange person."

Hearing that, Akuto stood up in embarrassment. He then began to wonder who had punched him on the head. He looked around but still could not see anyone.

"Be that as it may…are you sure no one else is here?" asked Akuto.

"I can tell you are not making this up. Was someone really there? I detect no mana distortion," said Korone while looking around with glowing eyes.

"Well, it doesn't really matter."

Akuto was still confused, but then Korone took back her previous statement.

"No, there is a mana distortion. A creature is approaching. It is not human."

Korone was looking deeper into the forest.

Korone spoke once more at the same moment the monster appeared from between the trees.

"This is a demon dog. It is a dog that has been transformed after taking mana into its body. They may be breeding in this area."

The demon dog was twice the size of a normal dog. Its fangs were long and it had drool and erratic breaths leaking out from between its fangs. A ferocious light in its eyes was turned in Akuto's direction.

"Permission from the government is not needed to eliminate a monster. I will now exterminate it."

Korone stuck her hand into the bag that she always held dangling down. She pulled out a gun that was clearly much too large to fit inside that bag. From the size of the barrel, it was enough to blow off the demon dog's head in a single blast.

Akuto panicked when he saw it.

"W-wait a second. You call it a demon dog, but it was originally just a dog, right? Let's try not to kill it."

"But it is dangerous."

"If it was transformed by mana, can't we just remove that mana?"

"No magician has ever done so before."

"If no one has ever done it, then it's worth a try, right?"

Akuto spread his arms and walked closer to the demon dog.

"This is dangerous," said Korone as she stopped him.

"No, I get the feeling I can do this. I don't know how, but I learned the theory on mana control in class today."

Akuto took a few more steps toward the demon dog.

"If understanding the theory was enough, the world would be filled with magicians. I will exterminate it as soon as I detect immediate danger."

Korone held the gun at the ready.

The demon dog bent its body in preparation to leap at Akuto. The instant the tension in its leg muscles was about to be released, Akuto took action before Korone could fire. He shot a white light from his open hand.

—I did it!

Akuto was secretly surprised it had worked, but he had succeeded in controlling the mana inside the demon dog by releasing mana from his palm. An identical white light shot from the demon dog's body. That light continued to flow from the demon dog as if it was overflowing.

"The mana is being taken from within its body. 90%...80%..." announced Korone.

As her countdown continued, the amount of light leaving the demon dog lessened. At the same time, the ferocious look left the demon dog's eyes.

"The reason no magician has ever removed the mana from a monster's body is because it is supposed to be impossible. I have recorded this and will submit a report," explained Korone as she put the gun back in her bag.

"Then what did I do? It seemed really easy to me…"

Akuto turned back toward Korone.

The demon dog had become a normal dog. It was a shaggy dog with long fur. It sneezed in surprise and began running in circles while wagging its tail.

"This is not a crime, so you will not be punished. However, the data will be used for research. Also, this was unexpected."

Despite actually saying something sentimental, Korone was as expressionless as ever.

"What was unexpected?"

"That you chose to save this dog. Given your past actions of hurting girls, gathering girls' underwear, and peeking at girls' underwear, I assumed you only did bad things."

"That's quite the arbitrary selection…" complained Akuto.

He pushed the backside of the dog that was still running in circles to guide it toward the school. It was now just a stray dog, so someone would surely take it in there. It ran off in the right direction, but suddenly changed direction. It made a mad dash for a seemingly empty area.

—…?

Akuto was puzzled, but then a scream rang out among the trees.

"Kyaaaahhh! A dog! Stay awaaayyyy!"

He could not see anything, but there was no mistaking what he heard. And the dog was definitely playfully chasing after something.

Akuto recognized the voice.

—Soga…Keena?

Suddenly, a girl appeared out of thin air in front of the dog. Red hair suddenly filled what had been empty air. He saw the color of white skin between that hair. It seemed Keena was nude.

—Eh?

As Akuto watched on in shock, Keena shimmered and disappeared once more. However, the dog continued to chase after something. That meant…

"Somehow I doubt it, but can she turn invisible?" he asked Korone.

"It seems she can. I saw it for myself. It appears I cannot trace her mana when she hides herself. If not even a L'Isle-Adam such as myself can detect her, she truly is turning invisible," agreed Korone.

"But the dog is still chasing her…"

"She may still leave a minute scent. And as for her clothes…"

"I guess she can't turn anything she's wearing invisible with her."

Akuto watched the area just ahead of the dog.

—Why did she follow me out here if she has to strip down naked to turn invisible?

Akuto then caught sight of something glittering. It was the same light as the previous day. Something clicked within Akuto's head.

It had to be a hair decoration she was wearing. He suddenly felt the same nostalgic feeling as in his dream that morning. The hair decoration seemed somehow familiar

"Ah!"

Akuto recalled something from the past. He had once bought a piece of jewelry with all of his money. He had meant it as a sign of his determination to earn his own money from then on, but he now realized it could have been taken as a request for her to remember him.

—Now I understand why she would follow me out here…

Akuto ran forward with this new realization. Keena was fleeing further and further away. The dog was showing no sign of giving up as she ran toward the school.

Akuto chased after the small light flying through the air. It would normally have been easy to lose track of, but he could just follow the dog whenever he did.

The dog ran into the school building during the lunch break. The students looked on in surprise as they avoided the dog and Akuto. Keena must

have been quite flustered because she ran up stairs, down them again, and all over the place at random. She would occasionally let out a scream, but the students loudly watching the commotion drowned it out. No one else seemed to notice her presence.

—What is going on? I'm not sure how to bring this to an end. Oh, maybe she's afraid of dogs. Um…In that case, I need to do something about this dog. Then I can speak with her.

Akuto picked up the dog, said "here", and handed it to a girl in the crowd of onlookers. The girl said, "Eh? Wh-what am I supposed to do with this…?" However, she seemed to like animals because she embraced the dog and did not let go.

"You can have it," said Akuto before returning to his pursuit of Keena.

With only the hair decoration to go by, he began to lose sight of her, but she must have been growing tired because she began moving more slowly. It seemed she had a definite destination in mind now.

—Maybe I should make sure she doesn't see me following her.

Akuto hid behind a corner in the hallway and watched the hair decoration. Keena must not have had a very cautious personality because she headed straight toward the basement once she thought she had lost the dog and Akuto.

Akuto followed her from a distance and the door to a rarely used school supplies storage room opened. The hair decoration disappeared into it. The door then closed.

—No one else is around. If I head in there, we should be able to have a nice chat. Oh, but she'll be naked if I go in now. She went in there with some purpose in mind, so she probably has clothes hidden inside. I just have to wait until she's had time to dress.

With that thought, Akuto waited a while before sneaking up to the school supplies storage room, quickly opening the door, and slipping inside.

"Kyaaaahhh!"

He heard a scream.

Keena must have been just about to put her clothes on because she was naked with her panties hanging from her hands.

—It takes that long to get dressed?

Akuto was shocked at that, but Keena was even more shocked. She completely forgot to turn invisible and ran for the sole exit to the room. She was of course still completely naked. However, the sole exit was also the sole entrance, and Akuto stood there after having closed the door behind him.

"Waahh!"

Akuto panicked. From his standpoint, Keena had suddenly charged at him while completely nude, so he was unsure on what to do.

Her head smashed into his and they both fell to the floor. The teacher's large rulers, spare blackboard erasers, and other school supplies that's piled up came crashing down on top of the two who had fallen to the ground in a sort of embrace.

"Oh, s-sorry…!"

Akuto was almost lying on top of Keena – in fact, he was actually lying on top of her – so he hurriedly tried to stand up.

"Kyah! N-no!"

Keena immediately grabbed tightly onto Akuto. She grabbed onto him from below.

"Wah! W-wait, could you maybe let go?"

"N-no… If I do, you'll be able to see me!"

Keena blushed as she wrapped her arms around him even tighter.

"B-but isn't staying like this even more embarrassing?"

"Th-then what am I supposed to do!?"

Keena pressed her body against Akuto while crying.

"I-I'll close my eyes, so let go. You can put your clothes on while I'm not looking."

Akuto shut his eyes as he spoke, but Keena shook her head.

"I can't trust you! You'll open them right away to look over every inch of my naked body while laughing and saying 'Geh heh heh. That's a nice body

you've got there, girlie'! Yes, I've always been told it is the diligent-looking guys who are like that!"

"I still think the current situation is even worse…"

"But now is different. Nothing will happen like this, so it's fine. I know you are a nice person."

Keena's comment confused Akuto.

"If you think I am a nice person, can't you trust me when I promise to keep my eyes closed?"

"These are two different things. Even nice people can completely change when they start thinking dirty things."

"Come on now…"

Akuto was frustrated, but the completely ridiculous conversation was also somehow cute and made him laugh.

"Wh-why are you laughing?" Keena was bewildered at first, but she finally began laughing along with him. "Eh…Eh heh heh… When I laugh it's kind of fun…"

When Akuto watched Keena laugh from so close up, he was further reminded of the girl from the orphanage.

"Hey, did we meet a long time ago by any chance?" he asked.

Keena's eyes widened in surprise.

"Eh? I don't think so."

"Wait…then why did you decide to be my observer when first met? And why did you follow me today?"

Akuto was surprisingly shocked by this. Keena seemed confused as to why he was confused.

"What? What? Eh? I thought I already explained that."

"No, you didn't."

"I like sleeping in that bamboo grove."

"I wasn't asking about that."

"That should be enough for you to understand."

"Eh?" Akuto was dumbfounded by how off her comments seemed from what he was asking. "Is that really worth skipping class for?"

"Yes. After all, my grades in magic are terrible," she said in the tone of someone giving an explanation to someone who simply did not seem to understand. "When someone like you arrived where I was resting, I of course knew there was some great meaning behind it."

"Meaning?"

"Don't you think that every meeting with someone is destined? Fighting destiny is lovely too, but you can't enjoy your life unless you just go with the flow of destiny." Keena continued to talk at length. "So when you said I must be your observer, I decided to become your observer. Even if I do not know what one is."

"You don't know!?" shouted Akuto without thinking, but Keena did not seem to get what he meant.

She simply continued speaking as if he was the slow one.

"It does not matter if I do not know. I decided to be your observer, so I knew everything would work out fine if I did what I thought an observer should do."

"That's a strange way of thinking…"

"It is not just a way of thinking. It is the truth. I have always been well-known as a girl who can tell when something is real. A long time ago, I even knew the difference between a toy and a hair decoration with a real jewel in it."

Keena shook her head to show off the hair decoration she wore. It was shaped like a bird and had a real jewel embedded in it.

—I really do think this is the hair decoration from back then…

"So do you really not remember?" he asked.

"Remember what?"

"I am the one that gave you that hair decoration."

Akuto was hoping Keena would remember now, but she only looked doubtful.

"That can't be true."

"Then how did you get that?'

"Well…" Keena thought for a moment. "Um…I don't remember."

"Wait a second!"

"But I really don't remember," said Keena quietly.

Akuto was at a loss for words, so Keena continued speaking proudly.

"But if you want to think you gave it to me, I understand. You are saying you think our meeting was destined just like I do, right?"

"Eh?"

—Come to think of it, why did I chase after her? Was it just because she ran away? No, I wanted to ask her about the hair decoration. But if she isn't the one, then we almost have nothing to do with each other. Then again, this is the first girl I've ever acted this way about… Wait, what am I thinking?

Akuto's mind was in a state of chaos.

"It's more fun if you assume it was destiny, right? That's how it is with people," said Keena with a smile.

When Akuto saw that somehow untidy smile, he accepted what she was saying.

An odd silence followed. Just as Akuto prepared to say something to break that awkward silence, another voice spoke from above them.

"I believe your actions here are a crime."

It was Korone's voice.

Akuto looked up in shock.

Korone was looking down on them. He had not heard the door open, so she must have teleported in like before.

"A-a crime?"

"I strongly suspect forced criminal indecency."

"Wait…I didn't do anything of the sort!"

"You cannot argue your way out of this situation."

"You know exactly what happened! She has to take off her clothes to turn invisible."

"I fail to see what that has to do with you lying on top of her."

"Um…" cut in Keena as Korone and Akuto argued. "What happens if this was a crime?"

"He is a minor, so a judgment will be made as to whether he must be placed under supervision or not. I possess the authority to make that judgment, so my decision will determine whether he must be sent to the juvenile hall or not."

Korone spoke calmly, but Keena did not seem to understand what was being said.

"O-ohh… I see."

"No, you don't," desperately protested Akuto. "You just have to tell her I did nothing wrong!"

"Eh? Why me?"

"If you tell her this was an accident, nothing will happen to me!"

The blank expression left Keena's face and a grin replaced it.

"I get it! So if I was willing, then there's no problem?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Korone.

"Then…" Keena looked up at Akuto. "I will say that if you promise to grant one request."

"Uuh…" groaned Akuto.

—Why is she asking me this? But I can't take on anymore troubles at this point.

"Well, will you do it? Will you, will you!?" urged Keena with a grin.

—Was she trying to lure me into this trap from the very beginning? If not, her personality makes no sense. Does she remember our past but is pretending not to? Could she have been watching me ever since we were kids?

Akuto was so confused he started to lose track of everything.

"C'mon, c'mon!"

However, Keena continued pressing him for a decision.

Ultimately, he gave in.

"Fine, I'll do it."

"Okay, then I embraced him," said Keena.

Korone readily accepted it.

"Understood."

Korone handed Keena her clothes.

"You gave in easily."

Akuto looked away and stood up.

It seemed Korone was helping Keena into her clothes. He heard a rustling of clothes as Korone said things like, "Okay, raise your hands." After Keena said she was dressed, Akuto turned back around.

Akuto could not decide if her expression was one of innocence or pure stupidity.

—What is with her? But I promised to grant a request of hers. What do I do if she asks me to use my magic power to help make her money?

Despite having the face of a villain, Akuto's thoughts were those of a saint.

Keena smiled at him and said, "Now about your promise."

"Yes?"

Akuto tensed up.

"Will you be my friend?"

"Eh?"

"Please become my friend."

"…Sure."

Akuto agreed mechanically, but he did not realize until a few moments later what she had said.

—That was unexpected… That doesn't seem like much and I suppose I could not hope for a better result…so why do I feel like I just took on a great burden that will remain with me for the rest of my life?

At that point, the chime signifying the end of the lunch break sounded.

His classmate's attention gathered on Akuto once more during the afternoon classes. This was because he entered the classroom along with Keena who almost never showed up for class.

"Wow! That's aniki for you!"

Hiroshi alone seemed overly excited about it.

Akuto could only force a calm expression.

Part 4

Once the day's classes were over, Akuto returned to the dorm and ate dinner. Once back in his room, he had to prepare himself mentally for the huge task ahead of him.

—Now then, this is where it gets tricky…

He glanced over at Korone who was expressionlessly relaxing in his room. He had already confirmed she had a tail. He had to pull that tail during the night.

Korone grew suspicious as Akuto watched her nervously.

"What is the matter? A change has come over your breathing."

"I-it's nothing."

"It does not appear to be an illness, but it could be a psychogenic symptom. Please be careful."

With that casual comment, Korone returned to diligently lazing around on Akuto's bed.

—Dammit. I guess I just have to pull the tail like this.

While Korone was looking away, Akuto stood up from the chair and sat on the bed. Now his hand could reach Korone's ass.

—When it comes down to it, this is making me nervous.

When he started staring so intently at her ass, he began to feel like he was committing a crime. Due to the way she was lying on the bed, her panties were perfectly visible from his position. He stretched his hand out toward them and could only think he was a molester or a rapist.

—J-just a bit further…

Sweat poured from his brow. When he began to wonder if she would notice, his heart rate shot even further up.

—A little more…

Suddenly, he heard a knocking.

"Gyaaahh!"

He almost jumped up from the bed out of shock.

Someone was knocking on the window from the outside. He turned around with the expression of a criminal caught in the act and saw Keena's grinning face outside the window.

—Oh, right. This is the first floor.

Given her smile, he doubted Keena had noticed what he was doing. He put on a casual expression and opened the window.

"Wh-what is it?"

"Do I need a reason to visit my friend?" asked Keena as she climbed in through the window.

"Hey, wait…"

"My new friend, let's eat together."

Keena held a bag of snacks out toward Akuto.

"Are girls supposed to come to this dorm?"

"Everyone does it all the time. As long as you're back in time, it doesn't matter."

Keena sat on the bed without asking. Korone sat up and raised a hand in greeting.

"Welcome. It is good for his mental health to have a friend."

"I know, right? At least you understand, Korone-chan."

Keena opened the bag and placed it on the bed. It contained rice crackers.

"Hey, don't spill crumbs everywhere."

"You can just wipe them off later," said Keena as she began munching on one. "Do you want one, Korone-chan?"

"No, thank you. I may be able to eat, but disposing of the waste later is a pain."

"I see. Too bad."

Keena likely did not understand what Korone had meant, but she nodded in acceptance and held a rice cracker out toward Akuto.

"Have one."

"…Fine, fine."

Akuto took the rice cracker and ate it.

—This is making it difficult to pull Korone's tail.

Keena then suddenly placed a hand on Korone's ass.

"Korone-chan, if you lie on the bed like that, he can see your panties."

"He said it made him nervous if I do not laze around while in the room."

"But he was trying to touch your butt when I got here."

Keena gave Akuto an accusing glare.

Akuto's heart jumped up into his throat.

"Touching a L'Isle-Adam's butt is not a crime," informed Korone.

"You mustn't do that," scolded Keena.

—And this is making it even more difficult…

Akuto began mentally sweating while giving a vague smile.

"I-I knew that. In fact, you are mistaken about what I was doing."

"I hope I am."

Keena continued munching on rice crackers. Akuto had only eaten one, but their numbers were beginning to visibly dwindle.

"Hey, A-chan."

"A-chan?"

"I can call you that, right? You can call me Ke-chan." Keena continued speaking without listening. "Do you like rice, A-chan?"

"Rice?"

"Yes," confirmed Keena. "Rice. That white grain."

"Um… I suppose I do…" agreed Akuto arbitrarily.

Keena suddenly leaned forward and said, "You love it, don't you! Then you need a rice cooker in your room! I'll come by every day! I'm not allowed to have a rice cooker in my room, but you can have one in yours, right?"

"I'm not actually sure if I can or not… And why a rice cooker anyway?"

"Sometimes I want to eat nothing but rice. Rice is so wonderful, don't you think? It's white and shiny like some kind of jewel! I love feeling like 'I'm eating a pile of jewels!'. It's like I have countless pearls in my mouth and the sweet flavor spreads out in my mouth as I bite into them…"

For some reason, Keena spoke on and on about rice as if entranced.

"I…can't have a rice cooker here," said Akuto quietly.

Keena immediately shouted back, "No, you have to! I want one! I want one!"

"Why do I have to do what you say?"

"If you refuse, I'll reveal to everyone how perverted you are, A-chan."

"Now what kind of misunderstandings are you making!?"

"That's a misunderstanding?" Keena looked over at Korone for confirmation and the L'Isle-Adam nodded silently. "I see. It must be tough. You really are diligent, A-chan."

That last comment was made very casually, but Akuto was extremely thankful to hear it. Just like with Junko, he had a weakness for people who understood him.

"Th-that's right," agreed Akuto wholeheartedly, but Keena only looked confused.

"Do you want another rice cracker?" she asked.

Akuto took the rice cracker.

"Thanks."

"You can show your thanks by getting a rice cooker to-…"

"No."

"Eh? But rice is so amazing."

Keena then spoke at length on the wonders of rice. Akuto was a bit annoyed, but Korone seemed oddly interested. She even said, "So, cooked rice can have that much of an effect on the human psyche…"

"Ah, if only everyone could eat rice together. Then we would have world peace."

After that ridiculous comment from Keena, Korone said "I have this" and stuck a hand into her bag. She pulled out a cylindrical object with a switch. It was clearly a bazooka.

"This is a military drug dissemination device. It scatters a drug over a wide area to either poison an enemy unit or administer a healing medicine to an allied unit. If you put rice in it…"

"Stop that," said Akuto with a shrug.

"Why?" protested Keena while pouting her lips.

The ridiculous conversation continued on after that. The time helped to calm Akuto's heart, but he also grew more and more impatient as the night wore on.

—I need to hurry up and meet Etou-senpai.

"Um, don't you need to get back soon?" asked Akuto in the middle of the rice discussion.

"Eh? I can stay a bit longer."

"No, um, I have to study."

"Then I guess I have no choice… You aren't trying to drive me out so you can do something to Korone-chan, are you?"

Keena pouted her lips once more.

Akuto was shocked by her oddly accurate intuition, but he denied it with a stiff smile.

"Of course not."

"Ehh? Mh…See you tomorrow then." Keena reluctantly stood up. "But you really mustn't do anything to Korone-chan."

After repeating that for good measure, Keena climbed out of the window once more.

Akuto watched her leave and then shut the window.

"Sigh…"

He cleaned up the mess Keena had left and sat on the bed.

Korone then scooted up next to him.

"Now that the third wheel is gone, it is time for some tender loving," said Korone expressionlessly.

"Could you please stop with those jokes?

"This is no joke. I would feel bad if you became a sex offender because I failed to satisfy your sexual urges."

"How many times do I have to tell you that that incident with Soga-san was a misunderstanding!?"

"I am not talking about that. You were trying to touch my butt, were you not?"

Akuto began sweating at that, but then…

—Wait. This might be my chance.

"Sorry about trying to touch it, but didn't you say it is not a crime?"

"Not against a L'Isle-Adam, no," affirmed Korone.

—This is it.

"If you want me to touch it that badly, maybe I will."

—Ahh, this is making me sound really bad… But…

Internally, Akuto was incredibly nervous as he reached a hand out toward Korone's ass. Even if she was an android, he felt the same softness as from a human.

"Nn…" moaned Korone as she blushed.

Akuto stopped moving his hand out of shock.

"Oh, s-sorry…"

"Just kidding."

Korone's calm expression returned.

"……"

Akuto was left speechless.

—O-oh, right. The tail.

He quickly slipped his hand up and grabbed Korone's waist with his fingers. He felt the small tail there.

"Ah…"

As soon as Korone started to say something, Akuto grabbed the tail and pulled.

With a slight hum, Korone stopped moving.

—D-did it work?

Akuto peered into Korone's eyes. All light had left them.

—Thank goodness she actually stopped. Unless…this isn't another joke, is it?"

Given Korone's past actions, it was possible she was teasing him. Akuto lifted up her hand and poked at her leg to make sure she really did not move.

—Okay. With that settled…

Akuto climbed out of the window and left.

Part 5

He reread the memo.

<Tonight, come alone to the old strategy room in the main school building's basement.>

He had been worried about sneaking into the school at night, but he luckily managed to do so without running across anyone else. Akuto guessed so few people were out because the night could be dangerous. If there were monsters in the mountain behind the school, it would not be surprising if they would appear at the school during the night. And he became convinced of it when he entered the basement. The first two levels of the basement looked like a normal school, but the old strategy room was further down. The door leading down to that level was made of metal. It looked as if it would normally be locked, but it easily opened now. He pulled open that heavy door and found a dimly lit staircase. The hole leading down was truly an underground labyrinth that was no more than a cave with metal support pillars embedded in the walls to prevent a cave-in.

—Is this from the time of the war? I doubt the school wants students going down here.

It seemed the perfect place for a secret meeting. The old strategy room was located on the third level of the basement and its door was already standing open. Light spilled out from the room. He knocked and peered inside to find a large rectangular table with Fujiko sitting on the opposite side.

"Welcome. I have been waiting for you."

Fujiko smiled kindly. Akuto felt her graceful beauty went well with the underground environment lit only by a mana torch.

"Sorry about having you go through all this. Your instructions worked perfectly," said Akuto with a small bow.

"Pull the tail again to reboot her. She will lose her memories from a few seconds before and afterwards, so use it if you are ever in a bind."

Fujiko offered Akuto a seat.

"Now about what I wished to discuss," began Akuto.

"Yes, about Hattori-san. I have heard many rumors spreading about the two of you."

"I assure you, those are all nothing more than rumors. The truth is…well, it's complicated."

"Ho ho ho," laughed Fujiko. "Oh, excuse me. Hattori-san can be stubborn, but that is why we are all able to trust her. Do not worry, though. I will help you resolve this in a convenient manner. Hattori-san's injuries should be fully healed tomorrow, so I will contact her and set up a meeting between the two of you after school."

"Th-thank you so much."

"She is a very diligent person, so it should all work out if you show her a diligent side of yourself."

"I tried that, but it failed due to my lack of knowledge about this school's committee system."

"Yes. I heard from your class how you volunteered as the cleaning officer. How about I suggest a position for you to take?" Fujiko clapped her hands together. "How about you became the public morals officer? No position requires more diligence than that."

"That sounds good. But…sorry about doubting you, but is a public morals officer here the same as a normal public morals officer?"

"I believe so. Their role is to correct the morals of the students. The one aspect that is not normal is that the position is currently vacant."

"There isn't one?"

"Sadly, the school's morals have gone straight to hell…oh, pardon my language. The school's morals are so bad that no one wishes to be the public morals officer."

"I see."

—In that case, Hattori-san would probably love it if I took the position.

"You can submit the paperwork to the student council during the lunch break tomorrow. Does that sound good to you?"

"Yes, thank you very much," said Akuto as he stood up to go.

"If you have any problems, feel free to ask me for help. Oh, right. And if your discussion with Hattori-san does not go well…"

Fujiko placed two pills on the desk.

"A…drug?"

Akuto reached out and picked up the pills to look at them. They were perfectly normal looking white pills.

"I specialize in magical medicine research. If by some chance Hattori-san refuses to listen to you, feel free to use this."

Fujiko then handed a small handgun-like object to Akuto. It was small enough to fit in his palm and the barrel was large and flat.

"The pills are the magical medicine and that is a device used to administer magical medicine."

Akuto recalled that Korone had used a similar device.

"If you fire one pill each into the two of you, you will come to a true understanding."

Fujiko opened the grip of the device. It had exactly two openings for the pills. After loading the pills inside, she handed it back to Akuto.

He took it, held it in his palm, and stared at it.

"But I do not like the idea of using a drug to help…"

"I understand. This is only as a last resort. However, I know just how stubborn Hattori-san can be. Use it if it seems a fight will break out."

"In that case, I will borrow it just to be sure."

Akuto put the device in his pocket.

—What a nice person.

"I'll be going now," he said before leaving. He felt confident he would be able to solve at least one of his problems the next day. He hoped he could resolve all of the misunderstandings one by one once that happened.

As he was closing the door to the old strategy room, something caught his mind. He checked again, but it seemed it was nothing more than the door creaking.

"Is something the matter?"

"No, it was nothing. Goodbye."

After making sure Akuto had left, Fujiko grinned.

She did not simply smile; she grinned. This evil grin suited her beautiful face just as much as the kind smile from before, but it gave an entirely different impression. This was an expression only a truly evil villain could give.

"Now then. That went well! Heh heh heh heh…"

As she laughed, she snapped her fingers and the wall behind her rotated. A room was hidden behind it. She slipped past that wall and walked into the other room. This room was covered in purple velvet and silver decorations. The mostly-black furniture and the glass lab devices placed on top of it gave the room a very ominous atmosphere.

"It seems I will once more gain quite a bit without having to take any real action myself," said Fujiko to the empty room as she sat in a velvet-covered sofa.

However, she was not speaking to herself. A large glass container was sitting on the edge of the sofa. It was filled with a liquid and the severed head of a beautiful young man, who resembled Fujiko, was floating in it.

"Are you still doing that?" asked the head.

"Come on, onii-sama. You never do anything but lecture me." Fujiko stroked the glass container.

"And you never listen to what I say. Even after my death, you have done nothing but worry me."

"You have no soul, so you cannot actually be worried. Speaking with you is not easy."

Fujiko laughed.

Necromancy was a type of magic that reconstructed someone based on the personal records stored by their god. The reconstruction would provide the same reactions the living person would have. One could speak with these reconstructions and ask them anything they knew in life. However, their soul would not change due to new experiences, so they were fundamentally different from a living person. But as they gave the exact same responses as the living person, normal people had a high probability of growing very confused if they used the technique. Necromancy was therefore a forbidden spell that only top-class magicians were allowed to use.

Those who broke magical law by using forbidden spells as they liked were known as black magicians.

"Hey, onii-sama. It seems the future demon king will soon be my servant."

"Oh, no. What are you plotting this time?"

"Anyone given that drug will fall under my mind control."

"Then why not have him take it now?"

"What? I cannot do that. I enjoy deceiving people. Giving it to him now would be no fun at all. Plus, it is important that I never actually lied to him.

Once the two of them swear their loyalty to me, they will indeed get along perfectly."

"Oh, why do you have such a horrible personality, Fujiko?" complained the head. "This is why you are so lonely you have to hold conversations with me."

"That is merely because no one else can match my level. Why must we prove our qualifications to use magic? The students of this school are such fools for blindly following the government."

"I have no opinion on that. I never reached a conclusion regarding the issue in life. However, I hope your plan fails, Fujiko."

"Oh? Too bad then. I am sure it will go well. I have made plenty of preparations."

"Preparations? What do you mean?"

"That is a secret." Fujiko smiled mischievously as she pulled out a black-covered notebook that was not her student handbook. "If I implemented the dark plan written in this grudge notebook, it is sure to succeed… Heh heh heh heh heh heh…"

Fujiko grinned as she flipped through the "grudge notebook".

"What a dark girl Fujiko has become," lamented her dead older brother.

"Leave me alone. I want to make him mine no matter what. He possesses the power that we black magicians view as ideal. He is destined to destroy the world in the future… I must have him."

Fujiko stroked the glass container lovingly and brought her lips in for a kiss. The illusion of her dead brother grimaced within the glass container.

Chapter 4: That Highly Assumption-Prone Girl

Part 1

"Is there no public morals officer here?" Akuto asked Hiroshi.

"Not currently," he replied.

They were walking to school. Korone was also walking behind them since Akuto had deactivated her the night before. Just as Fujiko had said, she had lost her memories from a few seconds before being deactivated and a few seconds after being reactivated. In other words, she did not even realize she had been deactivated.

"Is there a reason why?"

He was not doubting Fujiko, but with the many customs this academy had from the past, he asked Korone just to be sure.

"According to the records, the previous holder of the position resigned. The reason is not given, but I predict it was due to fights with those who did not like the public morals officer."

"Fights?"

"Yeah, I heard he was targeted by delinquents," added Hiroshi.

In other words, it was a difficult job.

—Even Hattori-san should be pleased when she hears this.

Junko did not show up to class that day either.

During the lunch break, Akuto left Hiroshi behind and headed to the student council room.

It seemed the student council officers would gather there during the lunch break. They showed Akuto in while looking a bit frightened. The student council president however did not hesitate. She asked him what he wanted without fear.

The president wore a stylish hat and had a surprising amount of dignity and presence for her small size. That and her arrogant attitude gave off the impression of someone who was used to standing above others.

"Oh, what do you want? Such a famous visitor."

"Please stop treating me like I'm famous. Um…I came here in order to volunteer as the public morals officer."

"The public morals officer?"

The members of the student council began muttering amongst themselves. The three lower officers looked worriedly between the president and Akuto.

"Being the public morals officer," said the president while pointing at Akuto. "Well, it is not easy. Are you a good fighter?"

"I don't know. I have never done it before," replied Akuto honestly and the president gave a bitter smile.

"I see. Fine then. Being the public morals officer in this school is not easy. You can quit whenever you want, so just try it out for now. The public morals committee is an independent organization subordinate to the student council, so you can do the job however you like."

"Is that so? I don't entirely understand, but I will do my best."

"You will do your best despite not entirely understanding the situation? At any rate, welcome. I suppose this should at least be interesting, so that's something."

That last comment was spoken more to the surrounding student council officers than to Akuto.

Akuto was then given the key to the public morals committee room. As soon as he left the student council room, Akuto was surprised to hear an immediate school-wide announcement on the issue.

<This is a notification from the student council. A new public morals officer has been decided. He is Sai Akuto-san. If you have anything to discuss with him, go to the public morals committee room.>

It seemed the student council was good on ensuring that all arrangements had been made, but Akuto was unaware that someone else was even better at that. He realized this when a telepathic conversation arrived toward the end of the lunch break.

"Sorry about suddenly contacting you. Do you have a moment?"

Fujiko spoke to him through his student handbook just as he had finished eating.

"Yes," replied Akuto telepathically.

"Hattori-san may not have shown up for class, but I had her promise to meet you. The meeting is at 4 PM in the old barracks on the third floor of the underground labyrinth in the basement. Will that work for you?"

"It will. Thank you very much."

After thanking her, Akuto ended the telepathic conversation.

Part 2

Meanwhile, Fujiko grinned within the girls' bathroom after the conversation came to an end.

"Heh heh heh heh… Oh, this is so much fun. Conspiracies are so wonderful."

Fujiko used her student handbook once more to contact Junko. Once the telepathic conversation connected, her expression completely changed to that of a high-class girl.

"Is this Hattori-san?"

"Ah…Dorm leader!" replied Junko as if she was straightening up her back.

"Are you feeling better?"

"Oh…yes. I am fine now!"

"In that case, is it due to that new student that you are not at school today? I apologize if this is a difficult question to answer."

"Oh…um…yes. That…actually is the reason," said Junko with difficulty.

Her behavior showed just how much she trusted Fujiko as the dormitory leader.

"I only ask because that new student has asked me to help reconcile your differences."

"Reconcile our differences? After everything he-…"

"Yes. But I think this may be because he has become the new public morals officer."

"The public morals officer? But that…"

"Yes, it has been a horrible position to hold ever since that rumor spread that defeating the head public morals officer will increase your position in the rankings. It is truly sad that so many people are so obsessed with who is the strongest in the school."

"And that is why no one wants to take the position. But what does that have to do with reconciling his differences with me?"

"I do not know, but he may have some ulterior motive. I do not know what that boy is thinking, but he may want to create a single united faction within the school."

"Yes, it probably is that."

Despite speaking with an upperclassman, Junko let displeasure enter her voice.

Fujiko smiled and said, "I was asked to play the role of intermediary as your dormitory leader, but let me tell you to stay on your guard. He suggested you meet him at 4:30 PM on the third floor of the school's basement."

"A large area where he can freely act violently. I will be careful."

"Please do. Remember, 4:30," reiterated Fujiko before ending the connection.

She hurriedly connected to a third person.

"Ahn?" said a rude male voice.

"Oh? Since when do I allow you to act like that to me?" asked Fujiko in amusement.

The voice grew panicked and said, "S-sorry!"

"Have you forgotten how this works? Is it simply because it has been so long since we last met? Please do not make me remind you."

"I-I wouldn't dream of it! So what do you need, milady?"

"You should be thankful because I will be giving you some useful information. Have you heard of the new head public morals officer?"

"Oh, you mean that stupid bastard? He probably doesn't know what he's getting into, but I can only view this as a challenge against those of us on the underside of the school. That said, he's a bit of a special case. He has a government L'Isle-Adam, so we can't touch him. It would be best to just leave him alone."

"Silence," cut in Fujiko. "Takeshi, do you really think you can become a black magician like that? Listen. He will head down to the third floor of the basement at 4 PM. And he will not bring the L'Isle-Adam with him. Take a hostage or use whatever underhanded tricks you can think of to teach him where he stands at this school! No matter how much magic power or physical strength he has, he can be defeated with psychological violence. Make sure to give this your all."

Fujiko forcibly cut off the telepathic connection.

"Now then…"

Fujiko brought back the high-class girl look that the normal students looked up to. However, her mind was still filled with dark thoughts.

"The preparations are complete. No matter what happens, he will end up using that drug."

Fujiko chuckled. She passed a student in the hallway, but the student only saw Fujiko's usual kind smile.

Part 3

Once the afternoon classes came to an end, Akuto sat in his seat wondering how he would deactivate Korone and head to the basement with no one seeing it. However, he realized an odd atmosphere had filled the classroom. The other students always kept their distance from him, but they seemed legitimately afraid today.

"Does anything seem odd to you?" he asked Korone.

"I do not know what analysis of the situation led to that comment, but the primary difference from normal is the absence of those two," replied Korone.

"Those two…"

Akuto looked around. He realized that Keena and Hiroshi were not in the classroom. Keena had floated off somewhere, but that was the norm. Hiroshi, on the other hand, had gone to the bathroom earlier but he never come back.

—This makes getting to the basement much easier.

Akuto stood up.

"There is somewhere I want to go check out."

"Where?"

"The basement."

"Why?"

"I want to see those historical sites from the time of the war."

With that arbitrary excuse, he left the classroom. Korone of course followed. No one else followed, so he simply needed to deactivate Korone once he made it to the basement.

Just as they were walking down the staircase to the school portion of the basement, Korone suddenly spoke up.

"By the way."

"Yes?"

"As your observer, I will not interfere, but I do not want you to fail."

Akuto was confused by this sudden comment.

"What are you talking about?"

"Do not forget that I must overlook it if someone is manipulating you. However, that can be seen as a form of interference on my part. The result of overlooking that manipulation can be seen as my responsibility."

Akuto still did not understand what she was getting at.

"Meaning?"

"I cannot say that you properly understand how you are seen by those around you. If you were to learn to understand that, it would help you grow as a person."

"Please do not say things that will just annoy me."

Akuto faced Korone for a few seconds and grew a tad irritated. He heard a suspicious metallic noise from nearby, but due to that irritation, he decided he was just hearing things when he did not immediately see anything.

"A-anyway, let's go."

He opened the heavy metal door leading to the underground labyrinth.

As soon as he passed through, he turned around and closed the door. He then realized Korone had her back to him.

It still made him nervous, but this was his second time and he knew this might be his only chance. He quickly reached for Korone's ass and stuck his hand up her skirt.

"Hyah!" shouted Korone in surprise.

Akuto's heart leapt into his throat, but he managed to pull her tail.

She stopped moving while still standing.

"Hoo… I don't think I'll ever get used to deactivating her like this…"

He sat Korone down on the ground next to the door.

He opened his student handbook and called up a map of the underground labyrinth. The school had an exploration club that sold the maps. The accuracy of the map was a bit suspicious, but they claimed it was perfect as far down as the fourth level. Also, the higher levels were used by a lot of the different school clubs. The old strategy room was apparently used for secret meetings by the administrators of the girls' dorm, so it would not be surprising if others used the area too.

And for this reason, it had many different entrances. Akuto had assumed the one he used was used a lot due to being the most obvious, but apparently it was so far away from most of the useful areas of the underground labyrinth that it was rarely used. There were apparently even paths leading to the basement from the dorms and some supply closets for classroom cleaning supplies. Akuto had not actually confirmed any of this was true, though.

Unsurprisingly, a portion of the underground labyrinth had become a gathering place for delinquent students. Once Akuto entered the third floor

of the basement, the students squatting on the side of that pathway and the students peering out from behind open doors glared at him.

—If they show this much blatant hostility, they lose any right to complain if I were to suddenly attack them.

Akuto of course had no intention of doing that. Part of it was due to being a good person, but it had more to do with him not being powerful enough to take on so many people at once. However, he had gained some ability with magic since entering the academy.

—And Korone isn't with me right now. As long as I don't kill them, I won't be blamed for it.

Akuto suddenly realized that his logical mind and his heart had begun to diverge. He felt discomfort and pleasure at the same time. His mind told him it was wrong to hurt others, but his heart told him it would feel good to hurt those belligerent types who enjoyed breaking the rules.

Akuto continued toward the old barracks while hoping those students did nothing to anger him.

—I hope nothing happens. But why would Hattori-san choose such a dangerous place to meet? Oh, I suppose she is #2 in the school.

He arrived at the door to the old barracks while lost in thought. It was a large door that slid to the side, so it resembled the door to a giant metal storage container. It was closed now, but it did not appear to be locked.

Akuto placed a hand on the door. It must have been opened relatively frequently because it slid loosely and smoothly open.

Cool air flowed out from within. It was dark inside, but it seemed to be a large area. Akuto could only see the area the light from the passageway reached. The room seemed to be filled with nothing but rows of three-level bunk beds that looked like steel shelves.

—Oh, yeah. This was the barracks. Now where's the light switch?

Akuto stepped inside.

An impact immediately struck his head as if something heavy had fallen on him.

He was instantly knocked to the ground.

—Gh!

The lights came on. Akuto could see several sets of legs. He was surrounded.

He looked up and saw several grinning faces. Everyone was holding weapons. The shock batons, socks filled with blunt objects, and other weapons that were meant to cause pain rather than to kill.

"Were you not even a little afraid?" said a mocking voice as one of the batons was swung down toward him.

—…!

Akuto was not able to bring up his arm to block it. Instead, he focused his mana on the back of his neck where the baton was headed. A flow of light gathered there and repelled the baton.

"Wah!"

The boy holding the baton hurt his hand when the weapon struck an unexpected wall.

—Am I getting used to this? No…I was just really focused this time.

Akuto was surprised at what he had managed. He had blocked the attack without losing control of his powers. He had not actually done any training, so he was a bit confused that it had worked so well. However, he almost instantaneously came up with the answer. Instead of vaguely trying to "protect himself" he had been focused on a specific goal.

—Now, how am I going to defeat them?

At that point, Akuto realized he was oddly calm.

He felt some pain, but he forced himself to stand up and view his surroundings. He stood at one end of the old barracks which was about the size of a gym. Six boys surrounded him. However, those were not the only attackers. A boy was sitting on a bed on the opposite side of the barracks and around a dozen more boys were surrounding him.

Akuto could not find any words to say to them. If they were going to use violence, he would simply have to respond in kind.

The boy with the baton walked toward Akuto. Instead of running, he tried to swing the baton down once more, but Akuto stopped it with his arm. He

then grabbed the baton and pulled. Once the boy lost his balance, Akuto punched him in the face.

However, the punched student looked somehow disappointed. The punch had not been as strong as he had expected.

—I see. It isn't like I actually know how to fight.

He may have succeeded in defending himself with mana, but Akuto had not grown physically stronger.

"H-he's really weak!"

The baton boy grew arrogant and came in for another strike. Instead of simply punching, Akuto released focused mana this time. His right fist struck the baton and the baton bent. The bent baton slammed into the boy's face.

He wordlessly collapsed to the floor.

The remaining students' expressions stiffened in fear. They moved away from Akuto bit by bit as if to avoid being his next target.

—How unpleasant can you be?

Akuto stretched his hand out toward one of them. He focused his mana there and fired a mana burst that resembled a bullet.

The mana struck the boy in the gut and he collapsed to the floor in pain. He held his stomach and rolled around while groaning.

"Shit."

The remaining four fired mana at Akuto just as he had done. Instead of dodging it, Akuto gathered mana on the surface of his body to deflect the blasts. The amount of light his shield created caused the four to panic.

—Without ever getting into a proper fight before, I had no way of knowing, but I guess this is what it means to naturally have more mana. This makes sense. They started with physical attacks because that is what they are best at.

Akuto ignored the four and walked further into the room. The one surrounded by the others was obviously their boss. He would be the one to speak to.

The boy had a large build and had enough meat on his bones for his chin to hang down slightly. He had an unassuming yet thuggish face, so he was clearly a brutal person at first glance.

"I would like to know why you suddenly attacked me," said Akuto and the boy sneered at him.

"Why does it matter?"

"I would feel better if I understood why. Right now, this leaves me uneasy."

"Then I'll tell you. Now that you're the new public morals officer, everyone who wants to prove their skill will attack you. We just thought we'd give you a warning."

"…Attacking me is a poor method of warning me. By the way, I never got your name."

"It's Kimura Takeshi," said the #3 ranked student. And then he gestured mockingly at Akuto with his chin. "Now then. If you understand, why don't you just let us beat the shit out of you?"

"What?"

"You don't get it? We want you to step down from your new position. Plus, it would be fun to make sure you never try to look down on us again."

"You just want a fight."

Akuto started to feel quite irritated.

"This won't be a fight."

On Takeshi's instructions, three of his followers dragged someone out from a bed farther inside.

Akuto felt his heart jump into his throat when he saw the person who was being dragged by the arms and legs like an old rag.

It was Hiroshi. The area around his eyes was swollen up like balls and he had dark bruises on his arms. The areas hidden by his clothes were likely covered in injuries as well.

"A-aniki…" Hiroshi was not unconscious. He looked up at Akuto and spoke in a pained voice. "Don't worry about me. Take care of these guys…"

Takeshi and his followers laughed at that.

"Does this guy think he's in some kind of manga!?"

On Takeshi's instructions, the other boys lowered Hiroshi to the floor.

"To sum it up, if you don't resist, we won't hurt him anymore. I was hoping to get that girl who hangs around with you, but we couldn't find her. But if you fight back or run away from here, I think you can imagine what will happen to her afterwards. You're gonna be living in this school for a long time. You don't want to spend that time in fear, do you?"

Takeshi gave his explanation in a tone that made it clear he saw himself as a sensible adult.

"I have a question," said Akuto calmly.

"What?"

"You mentioned that this was like a manga. Well, there's one thing I never understood about that." Akuto looked over at Takeshi and the other boys. "Some people have self-inserted themselves into the hero or the villain of the manga or light novels they read, but they give up on that once reality kicks in. Those people that give up find their own way to live their life, and that's fine. But then there are the people who mimic the characters that are utter trash. What are they thinking?"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Takeshi must have gotten fed up with the conversation because he gestured at his followers with his chin.

Those boys approached Akuto with thin smiles on their faces.

"How strange. I have never felt more calm. I had always thought I would lose control of myself at times like this, but I guess not."

Akuto waved a hand lightly in front of his waist. It was as if he was using a broom to sweep those boys' legs out from under them.

The boys approaching him suddenly crouched down as their waists collapsed beneath them. They appeared confused, but then they realized their knees hurt and they could not stand up.

"All I did was break your knees by moving the mana in the atmosphere. You can control mana too, so it all comes down to who has more power.

You need to at least put up some resistance." Akuto sounded almost bored as he spoke. He stretched a hand out toward one boy nearby and twisted his hand. This twisted the boy's arm. "I'm moving the mana near your body. You should be able to control it more easily than me, so there's no reason you should be overpowered by me. C'mon, try a little harder. If you don't, I'll break your arm."

After Akuto heard the unpleasant sound of the joint dislocating, he released the boy.

"Wait, don't you understand your position here?"

Takeshi frantically had his followers drag Hiroshi out.

"I do. By targeting those around me instead of me directly, you have left me with no choice. Now that I understand the situation, there is only one thing I can do."

Akuto broke another bone in another boy nearby.

"Y-you don't understand the situation at all!" shouted Takeshi.

"No, I do. I've thought this through. I am ensuring your followers cannot move but are still conscious. That way, they can see what happens next. They need to see just how horribly their boss suffers."

Akuto stretched out his hand. Takeshi quickly stood up and moved back while pulling a chain out of his pocket. It must have been made to be used in fights because it was glowing with mana.

Akuto tried to break Takeshi's legs with mana, but Takeshi moved further back to help him "overpower" Akuto's attempt. Takeshi had sweat running from his brow, but he managed to withstand Akuto's pressure.

"Either way, I'm going to take care of you last."

As soon as Akuto realized Takeshi would not be as easy as the others, he remotely controlled mana to shut the barracks door and looked at the other boys. All their faces became pale.

"I am not actually mad. I simply thought about how to completely prevent you from resisting and went through with it. I hope you won't hold a grudge. In fact, I will take this far enough that any grudge will disappear, so that won't be a problem."

A few minutes after Akuto made that announcement, he and Takeshi were the only two who were left standing. Most of the other boys had collapsed near the wall. They had tried to flee but failed.

And Takeshi was cornered against the wall. He had continued moving back to escape from the pressure of Akuto's mana manipulation, but his back had reached the wall. He realized he was likely done for and swung his chain horizontally towards Akuto's face with all his strength.

Akuto did not even try to avoid the approaching chain. The chain struck his face and wrapped around his head.

"Did I get him?"

Takeshi's face lit up, but his smile quickly froze over. The chain was floating about a centimeter away from Akuto's face.

"He blocked it?"

"Is it really that surprising?" Akuto snatched the chain away, unwrapped it from his face, and tossed it behind him. "Now please don't beg for forgiveness."

Akuto focused mana on the little toe of Takeshi's right foot and bent it backwards. With a small snapping noise, the toe broke. Takeshi screamed and crouched down. Akuto lifted him up in front of him. Takeshi floated in the air as if he was being crucified.

Now that he was sure the immobilized followers could see, Akuto rotated Takeshi's ankle completely around so it faced the opposite direction.

Takeshi's scream echoed throughout the large barracks.

"Stop!" shouted a voice behind Akuto.

Akuto reflexively replied, "I can't stop here. I won't be satisfied until I have scared them a little more than this."

Only after speaking did Akuto realize the voice had been female.

—Oh, no!

Akuto turned around. The barracks door he had closed had been forced open. Junko stood beyond it.

"Damn you! So you've finally shown who you really are! I wondered why you called me out here!"

—Oh, no, no, no, no. What do I do?

"No, they threatened me, so-…"

Sweat poured from Akuto's brow when he realized how unconvincing an argument that was. Someone coming in now would see a boy with a cruel look in his eyes crucifying and tormenting a large thug ranked third in the school while surrounded by about 20 people with broken legs and shoulders, some of whom were bleeding.

"Don't lie! It is obvious who is threatening who here!"

Junko took a defensive stance with the expression of a police officer entering the scene of a mass murder.

"You've got it all wrong! I was only protecting myself."

"No excuses! I know what you are after now! You only became the head public morals officer so you could bring all of this school's thugs under your control! You want to conquer this school so you can influence the students who will later take important positions in the government!"

Junko pointed an accusatory finger at Akuto.

"I-I wasn't thinking anything like that. I swear!"

The thought had truly never even occurred to Akuto, so he the accusation caught him off guard.

"Damn you! Why am I the only one you act so nicely to!? Oh, I get it. You know I am the only highly ranked student who dislikes illegal activities! You wanted me to ally with you so you could deceive the proper students as well!"

Junko was prone to making a lot of assumptions.

—This is never going to end at this rate…

Akuto recalled what Fujiko had told him. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the device she had given him to administer those pills. Those pills would allow them to come to an understanding.

—I'll start with myself…

Akuto brought the device to his arm and pulled the trigger.

But nothing happened.

—Eh?

He opened the grip of the device to check inside. The pills were gone.

—What?

The device could not go off on its own, so the pills would not have been volatilized. Also, the device had no hole they could have fallen out through.

Akuto panicked, but he had to give up on using the drug if the pills were gone.

"U-um…"

While trying to figure out what to do, Akuto started by lowering Takeshi to the ground. Takeshi let out a short cry of pain and collapsed. Akuto tried to walk toward Junko, but she held her wooden sword up as if he was a ferocious beast.

"S-stay back! If you do not, I will do my best to defeat you even at the risk of my life! Even if I am defeated, I will get at least one strike in! I will show you the spirit of humanity, you demon king!"

"W-wait a second… You don't have to get so serious."

Akuto walked forward while spreading his hands to show he had no intention to fight, but Junko moved further back.

"Stay back! I know I cannot match your power! I have no choice but to gather volunteers from around the school to formally punish you!"

"Punish me?"

"Have you not heard of the school's punishment system!? I suppose you wouldn't have! But that does not matter! We will use that system against you! Justice will prevail!"

Junko must have been very frightened because her hands were trembling as she pulled a ball out from her pocket. Akuto immediately recognized it as the smoke bombs used by the ninja, the combat group of the Suhara followers.

"No, wait…"

Akuto stepped forward to stop Junko, but that only made her rush things.

"Eee! I-I said to stay back!"

She tried to throw the smoke bomb and step back at the same moment and tripped over one of the collapsed delinquents.

The smoke bomb slipped from her hand.

"Ah… Oh, no…"

Junko seemed flustered as the smoke bomb struck the floor and loudly exploded a few moments later.

"Eeee!" screamed Junko as white smoke spread out.

"Wah!"

Akuto instinctually moved away.

His field of vision was filled with pure white and a strong unpleasant odor filled his nose.

The air was quite still in that basement room, so it took a while for the smoke to clear. By the time it grew thin enough to see, Junko was nowhere to be seen.

"What am I supposed to do?" muttered Akuto as he scratched at his head.

Takeshi, his followers, and Hiroshi were all lying collapsed on the floor. Almost all of that was Akuto's doing.

—But…

Akuto was bothered by the fact that he had never "lost control of himself" while attacking Takeshi. He had been trying to act rationally and did not see what other option he had had.

—This is a problem… But I do see how this could look like the actions of a demon king. And I'm sure it will all be blamed on me… What a pain…

Akuto silently complained while returning to the entrance of the underground labyrinth. Once there, he reactivated Korone.

She had no memories of being switched off, so she immediately said, "Now, let's go check out the basement."

He told her they would visit the old barracks. She would be able to heal the injured, but that meant he would have to tell her the truth. While walking back there, Akuto racked his brain for a way to explain it to her.

Part 4

"In other words, you did all sorts of things while I was deactivated?" asked Korone.

"Sorry."

Akuto bowed his head.

They were in his dorm room. Korone was on the bed while Akuto was prostrated on the floor. He had explained most of what had happened up to now.

"I have no records of the incident, so I cannot punish you. However, I still think you should take responsibility for this problem related to Hattori Junko," said Korone indifferently.

"I intend to. The problem is…"

"Obediently accepting this punishment would be one way of doing so."

The academy had a punishment system. This was of course the first Akuto had heard of it, but most of the other students had never heard of it either. It was a relic of the war that still remained in the school rules.

If anyone took actions that would harm the school, their crime would be made public and they must accept a duel from any number of people.

The system had likely been created to deal with traitors or spies.

"Allowing the accused a chance to fight does sound like a manly system, but…"

"It is a custom from a more savage time," agreed Korone.

Now that Akuto had been designated under the system, he would be forced into a duel with (i.e. be attacked by) Junko and the students she managed to gather.

"As for my crimes…well, I suppose I've done enough."

Takeshi and the others' injuries had been recorded by Korone. Plus, Junko would have already reported it to the teachers regardless.

"But at the same time…what if I win? Wouldn't that just make all this worse?" asked Akuto with an earnest expression.

"That is why I suggested obediently accepting the punishment," said Korone with an equally earnest expression.

"Is that really my only option? I tried speaking with a teacher, but that didn't help."

He had of course spoken with Mitsuko-sensei as soon as he knew what was happening. Her answer had been simple. Her eyes had lit up as she said the following:

"You're going to die? Are you really going to die? That's a huge deal! Oh, I'm so excited! Please give me a special front row seat to watch on! I'll make sure to bring you back with necromancy the instant you die!"

This was always the case, but it was now even more obvious that the difference between her and a black magician was that she had permission and they did not.

Akuto was more troubled than he had ever been before.

"So would anyone become a demon king if they had enough power? Ahh… Is cursing destiny my only option?"

Someone else was cursing destiny at the same moment.

It was Junko.

She was sitting seiza-style on top of the tatami mats laid out in her room. She was wearing a traditional white Japanese outfit. She focused her mind while holding a calligraphy brush in front of some Japanese paper.

"Father, Mother, Grandmother. Please forgive my actions. This is for the sake of justice and our country. However, I still must curse destiny for placing me here at this time. No, perhaps I should rejoice that I can defeat the future demon king while he is still weak."

She muttered some ideas for what she should write in her will. However, her emotions grew as she spoke and she was alone, so her words gradually shifted over to nothing but complaints.

"Ahh…And I thought he was actually a decent guy. I can't believe he is such a horrible person. I took such a liking to him at first and I had never seen a guy like him before, so I was so surprised to hear he was a demon king. But now I see he has the perfect personality for it. And why does he know just what to say and do to hurt me the most? I may be strong, but I am clumsy, faint-hearted, and only put on a show of being so tough. I hate those people who love getting into fights and try to do the right thing, but I never did anything about Kimura Takeshi and did not have the courage to volunteer as a public morals officer. …How could he do all that so easily?

And he's strong too… No, this makes it sound like I care about him. Don't be ridiculous. I might die tomorrow, so I need to write my will. Let's see…"

Junko reached for the inkstone to put ink on the brush, but she could not quite reach it.

"Oh, come on…"

She stretched her arm out as far she could and ended up looking up at the ceiling. Her gaze naturally left the inkstone. Then her fingertips touched it.

"Oh, there it is."

Junko tried to bring it toward her, but something seemed off. It was closer than it should have been.

"What?"

She tilted her head in confusion.

The inkstone was clearly closer than where she had seen it. It had moved toward her hand.

"Eh?"

Junko looked around, but no one was there.

"Wh-what?"

Still confused, she returned to writing her will.

Fujiko had seen what happened in the old barracks using a Monitor. It was a tiny hidden camera, shaped like a winged insect. Such devices were of course illegal, but Fujiko had made this one herself. She had seen everything, from Akuto's violence to the missing pills, in the crystal ball located in her hidden room. Up to Akuto's attempt to use the drug, everything had gone according to her plan. However…

"That is very strange," she said to her brother in the glass container.

"Is it?"

"Yes. The disappearance of those pills ruins my plans." Fujiko thoughtfully brought a hand to her chin. "But…he was so calm in his violence. And he mistakenly views his actions as justified. Don't you think he is very well suited to being a demon king?" Fujiko almost seemed entranced as she

spoke to no one in particular. "If only I could make him mine without using that drug."

Chapter 5: The Menacing Optimist

Part 1

A depressing morning came for Akuto.

The entire school had been abuzz with excitement since before dawn. The talk of the punishment system being brought into effect had spread the previous night. How exactly it would be carried out had spread via a variety of methods including telepathic communications and posters.

*Anyone who reports their intentions may take part in the punishment. *The punishment will take place only within the hour long lunch break. *If the target of punishment escapes within the school, his or her crimes will be ignored. *Even if the target of punishment is killed, the other participants will not be charged with a crime. *Aiding the target of punishment is permitted, but anyone who does so will be treated identically to the target of punishment.

"So I just have to escape from every student in the school during the lunch break."

Akuto had mentally prepared himself during the night. As he walked to the dining hall for breakfast, a path opened in the waves of people before him so quickly even Moses would have been jealous.

—This is the most they've ever hated…no, feared me.

This was quite a shock to Akuto. But once he took his seat, he heard an excited voice that was filled with so much affection it bordered on worship.

"A-aniki! I will aid you! I, Hiroshi, will risk my life to protect you!"

Hiroshi was bowing down despite his wounds not being completely healed.

Akuto turned around with a smile, but immediately rejected the offer.

"No, you shouldn't do that. You don't have to die."

"But I know this only happened because you were trying to save me…"

Hiroshi shed truly apologetic tears.

"And that's exactly why I don't want you to die here. I can easily escape them, so let's keep this more carefree," said Akuto while trying to keep his voice as carefree as possible.

After hearing that, Hiroshi had no choice but to back off.

However…

—Y'know, that probably sounded like a challenge to everyone else…

Akuto glanced around at the other students who were glaring at him coldly.

Even after he went to school and classes began, everyone was restless. Akuto was no different. As class continued, he could feel the tension building.

—I need to make sure Hiroshi quickly gets out of the way.

He began mentally simulating the situation.

—Should I jump out the classroom window? I don't want to get anyone in the class hurt. Oh, come to think of it, Keena isn't here today either. How insensitive…

Akuto glanced around while thinking.

The class would be over in 5 minutes.

His classmates' expressions were filled with an odd tension. Most of them wanted nothing to do with the punishment because they did not want to get hurt, but a few boys who were secret fans of Junko's were giving off obvious killing intent.

And on top of it all, Mitsuko-sensei was incredibly excited, so the class was nothing more than reading the textbook.

One minute to go.

Students from other classes began gathering outside the class. Either their classes had let out early or their last class before the lunch break had been cancelled. The highly motivated upperclassmen were likely either friends of Takeshi's who had not been present the day before or people ranked lower than #4.

—People are getting way too excited about this.

A bitter smile appeared on Akuto's face, but the countdown had already begun.

"Aniki…" said Hiroshi worriedly.

"Don't worry about me. You need to run away immediately," replied Akuto.

Mitsuko-sensei then made an unnecessary comment.

"The chime will be the signal. No moving before that. Five, four…"

She counted down while watching the clock.

And then the chime rang.

"Okay, class is over for…"

Before Mitsuko-sensei could finish, a throwing knife, a blowgun dart, a normal dart, and a magic bullet all flew straight toward Akuto. He created a mana screen around him, kicked off of his desk, and jumped for the window.

The mana screen stopped most of the attacks, but the magic bullet which was made of pure mana broke through the screen and hit his leg. Akuto lost his balance and crashed through the window. He fell toward the schoolyard along with shards of glass.

—But I stopped those attacks so easily yesterday… Am I not as focused now? Do I have to be angry like I was yesterday?

Akuto was confused, but he did not have time to think. His back slammed into the ground. Akuto had more than enough magic power, but he had not been taught how to use it. Akuto was painfully reminded just how inexperienced he was. The attacking students used flight magic to fly down from the window.

—But I can't fly!

Akuto ran toward the mountain behind the school. He thought he would have an easier time of running away there, but that turned out to be a huge mistake. He clearly lacked an understanding of what it meant to be able to fly. The students immediately spotted him from up in the air and started firing all sorts of projectiles at him.

—Wah! I guess going in the woods isn't going to cut it!

Akuto turned around to head back to the school building, but several pursuers were running in his direction.

—Dammit. Most of those are just onlookers!

"Don't get hurt!" shouted Akuto as he fired mana straight forward where it violently exploded.

He spotted a few people flying through the air, but he did not have time to see whether they had been blown away by the blast or if they had used flight magic to escape.

He charged through the center of the explosion and back into the school building. There were a lot more students running around, onlookers and otherwise, but he would have an easier time attacking his pursuers in the limited space of the hallways.

"Outta the way!"

He ran through the unfamiliar school building while focusing on knocking people out of his way. Not even ten minutes had passed, but he was already out of breath. He looked for somewhere to hide, but someone would see him wherever he went. Most of the onlookers were not exactly allies.

Once he could no longer run and had to slow to a quick walk, he would be overtaken. He was forced to wander around the school like a cat that could not find its way home.

—Are they moving as a group?

As he wandered around, doubts started to enter Akuto's mind. A few pursuers had attacked forcefully, but had not pursued him far. It seemed he was being led somewhere.

Finally, Akuto made it to the roof. It contained a large lawn used as a sports ground, but the roof was still the roof. It had an edge.

—So I'm cornered.

Akuto had no choice but to make up his mind. When he reached the edge and turned around, he found himself surrounded by a crowd. His pursuers definitely had an excellent strategist who had used the fact that he could not fly to corner him. And that strategist was…

Junko walked forward from the crowd. He had expected to see killer intent in her eyes, but he instead saw a desperate resolution. She held a real sword instead of a wooden one.

"This is when I would want to challenge you to a one-on-one duel, but there is no shame in having help against someone with your power. Remember that others will come after me even if you avoid my sword."

Junko held her sword up in the Hasso Kamae.

"Please stop this… Although I suppose it's too late for that."

Akuto gave a powerless smile.

Junko nodded and said, "Yes, it is much too late."

Junko then chanted a spell under her breath. Her body blurred and the same type of copy as before began to appear. However, her body did not simply split in two this time. Two additional Junkos appeared beyond that.

The total of four Junkos faced Akuto and began to charge forward.

—I can't avoid all four. And I doubt I can reflect all of them either.

He felt he would have been able to defend this attack when he had subconsciously sent his mana out of control or when he had been trembling with anger, but he could not block these real swords now. Akuto could instinctually feel that.

"Kiaaaaaaaahhh!"

The four Junkos leapt toward him simultaneously. Four different slashes assaulted him from four different directions.

—Tch!

Akuto avoided one and tried to turn aside the tips of the others with mana.

But just as he had expected, he did not manage to completely stop them. A scrap of cloth was sliced from his uniform and blood flew through the air. One of the swords had grazed him.

"Uuh…!"

Akuto staggered and leaned on the fence around the roof. The tips of four swords pressed up against his throat.

"This ends here," said all four Junkos in a cold tone.

"I really don't think I've done anything horrible enough to warrant this," groaned Akuto in pain.

Junko's expression grew cloudy.

"Then you need to change the way you think. No, you will not even have the chance to do so. I saw you trying to control others through violence. Do you not understand how much of a crime that is?"

"Oh…that."

Akuto now understood.

The fact that he had held no doubts about that before may have meant he really did have the personality of a demon king. If he had simply given into his anger and beaten up those delinquents, he would not have been called a demon king no matter how powerful he might be.

"But it just seems that's the kind of personality I have."

"Then unfortunately, you must die," said Junko.

Akuto could hardly believe it, but he began thinking he might actually have to prepare for death.

But then…

"You may not be able to change your personality, but you can change your way of thinking," shouted a cheerful voice form overhead.

Akuto and the four Junkos looked up in shock.

Keena was floating there. When she noticed Akuto looking up at her, she frantically held her skirt down and landed on the rooftop. Keena held her hands together behind her back and gave a smile that did not suit the atmosphere of the situation in the slightest.

"Keena?"

"Wh-what are you doing here!?"

Keena ignored Akuto and Junko's surprise and spread her arms wide. She then spoke in an entranced voice as if she was reading poetry.

"The two of you are true friends. You do not need to hurt each other."

"What nonsense are you talking about now?"

"That's right. We were just about to…"

"No. After all, haven't you two been paying an excessive amount of attention to each other?"

Keena was speaking so loudly that Akuto and Junko were completely taken aback.

"Eh?"

"W-wait a second…"

"No! I know the truth. A-chan is very diligent and works so earnestly when it comes to helping others. He just wants to show off to others a bit while he does so, and that backfired."

"Hey…" said Akuto in shock.

"And Junko-chan saw through to that side of A-chan and really did want to get along with him, but she had to worry about her reputation. Junko-chan is also jealous of A-chan's strength and how he so readily does the right thing. I know all of this!"

"W-wait!"

All four Junkos blushed.

"The two of you may be a bit clumsy, but you are true friends. And that means you must not fight!" said Keena in a voice that reverberated across the roof.

All maliciousness had left Akuto and Junko. Junko was now hanging her head down and blushing.

"Tch… I have lost my motivation. I back out of this fight." Junko's copies disappeared and the real one looked away from Akuto. "Do not listen to what Keena says. She has no idea what she is talking about."

Akuto gave a bitter grin while holding his wound.

"I won't…in fact, I was never going to. By the way, this hardly resolves everything."

Akuto looked at the crowd of students surrounding him.

A few of them were giving off an intense aura of murderous intent.

"True. Everyone else's anger will not be cooled just because I leave the fight," said Junko.

However, Junko was not aware that the murderous ones were mostly her hidden fans.

—Either way, I'm about to be killed here. Honestly…

Akuto complained in his heart. It should have been obvious that Keena's speech was not going to resolve everything.

"Do you need a helper?" asked Junko as she turned toward Akuto just slightly.

Akuto shook his head.

"Don't joke. You're the one that started this fight."

"And I admit I went too far!" Junko turned completely toward Akuto. "So let me help you!"

"Letting you be killed here would be getting my priorities completely backwards."

"I'm trying to tell you I won't let that happen!"

"But you're weaker than me…"

"Are you trying to make me angry again!?"

Junko and Akuto's argument seemed to heat up the crowd even further. An impatient anger filled them.

And then…

"Don't worry!" shouted Keena.

"Eh?"

Akuto and Junko looked toward Keena, assuming she had no plan whatsoever. Keena confidently placed her hands on her hips and spoke.

"If everyone eats rice together, everything will be okay!"

Both Akuto and Junko held their head in their hands.

"Are you still going on about that?"

"Can you please do something about this idiot?"

But Keena was not discouraged.

"No! Rice is the best thing in the world. Now, Korone-chan!"

With that last comment, Keena raised her hand. Akuto looked down and saw Korone holding a bazooka-like device on the ground below.

"Eh?"

Korone suddenly fired some sort of shell from the bazooka-like device. It shot into the air while trailing smoke and then burst near the roof.

—That's the device for disseminating medicine she mentioned.

Akuto recalled what Korone had said during that ridiculous conversation.

"Did she put rice in that?"

Keena nodded.

"Now everyone in the school has rice! We can all get along!" she exclaimed.

A dark expression came to Akuto and Junko's faces.

"We're done for…"

"Yes, we are."

The two prepared themselves and faced the crowed.

However…

"What?"

The crowed had clearly calmed down. They were enthralled by the light – that is, rice – that was raining down on them from the sky.

"It can't be…"

"Impossible…"

Akuto and Junko were both dumbfounded. Keena was the only one celebrating.

"Yay! Yay! Rice really does make everyone get along!"

—No, they look less like they're "getting along" and more like…

Akuto had noticed a change come over the crowd. The way those who had fallen under the effects of Korone's bazooka were acting, he could only assume they were under the effects of some sort of drug.

"Ah…Ah ha ha ha ha ha…"

"Are you feeling a lot better all of a sudden too?"

"Ah…this is amazing! I feel so good!"

They were all saying similar things.

"Wh-what is going on?"

Akuto immediately put up a mana barrier. Junko and Keena were inside the barrier as well.

He watched the crowd in amazement as they started to wander off somewhere like a crowd of zombies. They were leaving the roof.

"Should we follow them?"

Junko wrapped an arm around Akuto's shoulder to help him up. Akuto held his wound as he stood.

As they followed the crowd, the crowd's numbers grew and grew. It seemed they were all heading for the girls' dorm.

"What is going on?"

Part 2

Akuto tilted his head in confusion, but he received his answer before long.

The crowd gathered around the girls' dorm. The girls of course entered the dorm. The boys who were not allowed in only shouted from outside.

"Etou Fujiko-sama! Please let us see you! Let us see you even if only for a moment!"

The girls must have been surrounding Fujiko's room. Shouts of "Fujiko-sama!" could be heard from within.

"Wh-what?"

Akuto and Junko were utterly confused, but then Korone approached from behind.

"This is the effect of a drug. Keena-san, did you put anything in here other than rice?"

"Yeah, I put in a drug I found," readily answered Keena.

—A drug she found? …Don't tell me it was those pills Etou-senpai gave me!

"Found? Found where?" asked Akuto and Keena once again readily answered.

"In your room."

When he saw Keena smiling innocently, he could not ask her any more questions. But what if she had been aware of everything and swiped the pills from Akuto's pocket?

—If she did steal the pills, was it when Korone warned me on the stairs? If Keena had turned invisible and followed me…

"What does this drug do?" Akuto asked Korone.

"It is not a drug meant to be disseminated like this, so I can only speculate. However, it is currently causing those affected to fall in love with a specified individual. It was weakened when disseminated, so the original drug may have had a different effect."

—So was I tricked by Etou-senpai? No, this doesn't prove that. I still need to be careful, though.

Many different suspicions filled Akuto's head. If he and Junko had been affected by that drug even more intensely, would they have fallen under Fujiko's control? If so, Keena had saved them without telling them anything.

"Wh-why did you put that drug in there?"

"Ehh? Because I heard it would make people get along."

"You were following me back then?"

"Yes. Sorry about not telling you. I hope you aren't mad."

"Th-then was Etou-senpai trying to trick me?"

"Why would she? Etou-senpai is a good person."

Akuto could not tell how much Keena knew or how much she had done on purpose.

—Oh, whatever. At any rate…

"When will this wear off?" Akuto asked Korone.

"I predict the effects will be gone by nightfall."

As Korone predicted, the girls' dorm was surrounded until nightfall. Akuto could not imagine what was going on inside. He could hear Fujiko screaming and he could see the boys outside shedding tears of joy whenever they heard her.

And of course, the issue related to Akuto was never fully resolved. The drug seemed to have affected the minds of the students to a certain extent, so they could not remember most of what had happened that day. They had returned to how they were before they came to hate Akuto so much.

By the time Fujiko had learned of her plan's failure, the girls' dorm was already surrounded by students. She had of course been monitoring Akuto, so she knew why this was: Korone had scattered her drug around.

"So he saw right through my plan!"

That was a misunderstanding, but it was only natural that Fujiko believed it.

"He truly is a demon king! Now that he has seen through to who I am, I can no longer worry about appearances! I must make him mine and bring ruin to this world as soon as possible!"

Fujiko pulled out her grudge notebook to add both complaints about Akuto and another plan, but the sounds of the commotion outside coming from her crystal ball brought her back to her senses.

The female students had already made their way into the girls' dorm. She looked away from the crystal ball and found her door was being pounded on so hard she feared it would be broken down.

"Fujiko-sama! Fujiko-sama! Fujiko-sama!"

"Embrace me!"

She could hear the girls calling for her. Apparently, the drug's effects had taken an odd turn due to being disseminated.

"I-I need to bring an end to this commotion…"

Fujiko brought her hand to her door's lock. The drug was supposed to make people do what she said, so even in this altered form, she assumed she could calm down the crowd.

However, an avalanche of girls poured into the room as soon as she unlocked the door.

"Whaaat!?

Fujiko was quickly buried in girls.

"Ahh, Fujiko-samaaa!"

"I truly love you!"

"I have always wanted to do this, Fujiko-sama!"

Arms reached from every direction and groped every inch of Fujiko's body. And in the process, all of her clothes were stripped from her.

"Noooo! Stop this!" shouted Fujiko, but her screams seemed to have the opposite effect.

"Ahhh, such a beautiful voice! Please cry for us even more!"

The voltage of the girls around her only continued to grow.

"Stoooppp! Do not touch me there!"

"Ahh! Yes! Yes! You are so wonderful!"

"Eeeee!"

Fujiko was crushed among all those girls even after being stripped nude. Her hell continued until nightfall.

"Nooooooooooooooooooooooo!"

"By the way."

After the commotion had died down, Akuto was sitting in his room thinking with his arms crossed. The biggest remaining question was what Keena had been thinking.

"What were you thinking?"

Akuto chose the obvious route of just asking her.

"Rice is so delicious," answered Keena.

She had a rice cooker in front of her and she was scooping white rice directly from it with a large spoon.

Akuto had bought the rice cooker. He had viewed it as an investment to find out what Keena had been thinking, but he was unsure if it had been of any use.

And then a knock came from his window.

The window opened and Junko stuck her head inside.

"Girls shouldn't come to the guys' dorm!" she shouted while pointing at Keena.

"You're here too, Junko-chan," complained Keena.

"I have not entered yet! I am only standing outside!"

"Ehh? So why are you here?" asked Keena while pouting.

Junko blushed and mumbled a bit.

"Sh-shut up!" She then pointed at Akuto. "I have decided I have no choice but to make sure you remain on the correct path! I will train you so you cannot do anything wrong! Prepare yourself!" She now turned back toward Keena. "More importantly, Keena! You turned invisible and went in my room, didn't you!"

"How can you say that? You have no proof."

Keena brought another spoonful of rice to her mouth.

"Proof? Well, how did you know what I said to myself!?"

"You mean what you were muttering about A-chan? I didn't hear that."

Keena's words only made Junko blush further.

"Yes, you did! You had to have! No, wait. You do not have to repeat what I said! Silence! I get it! I will not press you any further about this!"

Junko and Keena began arguing loudly right next to Akuto.

He held his head in his hands and said, "Ahh, what is going to happen to me…?"

"If you could know that, then you really would be a demon king. Are you sure you want that?" said Korone in response to his rhetorical question.

"Aniki! Wanna play a game, aniki!?" shouted Hiroshi from outside the door.

Akuto's school life had only just begun, but he was almost certain things would grow even more troublesome.

And Akuto was not the only person concerned about his school life.

Mitsuko-sensei and the student council president faced each other in the reception space prepared in the faculty room. The short yet imposing president did not change her attitude even when speaking with a teacher.

"Um, now that Etou Fujiko thinks Sai Akuto knows who she is, black magicians are probably going to enter this school," complained the president.

"I do not know exactly what happened 100 years ago, but I wonder if this will turn out similarly," said Mitsuko-sensei while pouting.

"I do not know, but I think we can manage," said the president with a dry laugh.

"At any rate, just because he is a demon king does not mean he is clearly defined as either good or evil. Try to handle this so he does not join either side."

"Sensei, this will not be that easy. If Hattori-san's parents show up to confront the black magicians, he will probably join her side."

"You just have to coordinate things so that does not happen."

"The student council president is not almighty! And there is one other thing that bothers me."

"What is that?"

"Soga Keena. Who is she?" asked the president as if her words held special meaning.

However, Mitsuko-sensei merely tilted her head.

"I don't know. She's a normal student. Just a normal student," she said with a grin.

Afterword

I don't know if I should say "Thank you!" or "Welcome!", but this is Mizuki Shoutarou. How are you getting by? I'm doing okay, I guess.

This may be sudden, but someone I used to know was a genius at finding terrible restaurants. I don't just mean he would recommend restaurants that he remembered not being all that good when he tried them on a whim. Although that is amazing in and of itself. Even when he would bring you to a high-class restaurant that he said was really good, that had a luxurious atmosphere with bronze statues, and that was quite expensive, the food would always end up being terrible.

People have different tastes, but everyone he would bring with him would complain that the food was terrible and too expensive. Then again, he thought the food was good, so I suppose it's even truer that people have different tastes. How strange.

And that's all well and good, but I learned something from that:

Worrying about how bad the food is won't help!

Once you learn that, things get a lot easier. When people worry too much about where to go when they eat out, they often end up mad about the service or food of the restaurant they choose. This is because those people are viewing eating out as something special. If they got rid of those expectations, they could enjoy it more. Take it far enough, and you can even celebrate terrible food.

This is terrible! How did they make something so bad? I'm impressed!

If you can think like that, you can start actively searching out bad restaurants. You get more points if it isn't a chain restaurant or a cheap place. Cafes that just serve premade meals don't count either. You need that surprise that someone actually cooked the food. You want to avoid something trying to be like a sweet spaghetti or something that tries too hard to be original. If you do that, you will find surprisingly few places.

For example, there's this one restaurant I found…oh, I guess I can't write about it publicly!

At any rate, there are a lot of different kinds of restaurants, but here are some of the names I gave the dishes I was most impressed with.

Mystery cheese pie.

Motsunabe from the pot of hell.

Hairtail that died in a traffic accident.

Those are the big three in my mind.

And those restaurants still get business.

If you find any restaurants like this, please send me a letter about it. Especially if it is in Kantou. I will probably go try the place out.

Okay, time to talk about the novel.

I hope you enjoy reading it, but you do not need to read too deeply into anything.

I put a lot of energy into writing this, so thank you for picking it up.

There isn't much I have to say about this novel, so I'll end this here. I am glad you bought the novel. There are no definite plans yet, but I want to keep these novels coming as a series. I need your help for that and I will do my best not to betray your expectations.

Now to give my thanks.

First, my illustrator, Itou Souichi-san. I am very thankful for the amazing illustrations. Just from the people who saw the roughs, Keena is already very popular.

Next, my editor, Ohashi-san. I am thankful you were willing to work with me over the New Year's holiday for this. I hope to finish things with a little more time to spare next time.

Lastly, I give my thanks to everyone else involved.

Now, let's enjoy the novel!

References

1. ↑ The name L'Isle-Adam is a reference to the French author Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam who popularized the term "android".

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